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NATIONALISM AND POLITICS OF NARRATING THE MALAWIAN NATION IN LEGSON KAYIRA'S NOVELS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By

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Thesis submitted to the Department of African Literature, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in African Literature

Supervisor: Professor Isabel Hofmeyr

Date of submission: 4th November, 2019

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in fulfillment for the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy as an original work done by me. This work has not been submitted to any other university or examined for any other degree before. I further declare that the various materials used in the study have been duly acknowledged.

SIGNED: Joshua Isaac Kumwenda: Signature _____ Date _____

(Candidate)

APPROVED: Professor Isabel Hofmeyr: Signature _____ Date _____

(Supervisor)

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Dedication

To my mother, Mama Ethel Nyasindani Nkhoswe who did everything to ensure that I attained education when the situation was very tough for her as a single parent, I say that this thesis is for you. May the Almighty God bless you with more years ahead to enjoy the fruits of my sweat and witness my rise to positions of prominence and influence in society. This thesis is also dedicated to you Daniel and Tawonga. I will always cherish the love, patience and understanding you guys have demonstrated over the years that I have been away.

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robust health, providing for my daily needs and guiding my thoughts throughout the epic journey of the PhD. For all these I say, “The Lord is good!”

Abstract

In this study I set out to investigate how Legson Kayira, one of the leading Malawian novelists, has narrated the nation across the colonial and early post-independence eras through his novels and autobiography, and highlight key questions surrounding the country's nationhood which he confronts. The thesis contends that the main concern of Legson Kayira's literary works is the concept of the 'nation,' a topic that has not been adequately explored by critics in relation to him. It argues that Legson Kayira largely narrates the Malawian nation as a contested discursive formation in which certain interpretations or discourses are pushed into dominance and others marginalised, but his aim is to foreground the excluded conceptions in relation to the dominant ones, to stage a contest or debate among the various strands of thought and/or belief. The five content chapters of this thesis are organized thematically as each chapter focuses on one text to thoroughly investigate aspects of nationhood around which the text is constructed and which appear to be dominant in that text. I draw upon the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) and Homi Bhabha (2009) to account for Kayira's narration of the nation. In Bakhtin's view, the process of narrating a nation exposes literature's tendency of heteroglossia, that is, to inhabit stories that portray different and competing imaginings of the same nation. The nation is, therefore, viewed as a space of dialogue between histories, narratives and perspectives all imbedded in it. As for Bhabha (2009), competing narratives of the nation are embedded within a literary text because the nation is an ambivalent, contested and unsettled construct to such an extent that literature's engagement with the nation is very political and ideological. Broadly, I also utilize the postcolonial theory, specifically its key concepts of essentialism, subversion, ambivalence, otherness and hybridity to consider how Kayira has interrogated key aspects of Malawi's nationhood through those concepts and reveal how the characters try to recover their lost pre-colonial identities, histories and cultures in vain which leads them to search for new identities

as individuals or groups. I observe that in narrating the Malawian nation, Legson Kayira has engaged elements of nationhood to confront key political questions and dominant discourses about the nation in order to achieve his overall aim of showing that the postcolonial Malawi nation-state is a highly contested and complex entity to define. In order to achieve that broad aim, I have concentrated on how Kayira has interrogated the main elements of Malawi's nationhood by using incidents in the characters' lives and elements of form that question or cast doubt over Malawi's status as a nation. I have further examined the rather problematic relationship between the tribe and the nation especially how it reproduces and challenges the country's claims to nationhood. This is done by uncovering the metonymic and oppositional relationships it has with the nation's official imagination, history and character. In all the texts that have been analysed, the protagonist as a member of a particular tribe represents the nation allegorically in order to construct and even undermine the dominant discourses such as the traditionally rooted depiction of the Malawi nation as a mother (Mother Malawi) which Kayira over-rules as masking the true nature of the country's nationhood and character. It is also observed that Kayira's writing seems to edge the Malawian nation imagination towards Globalization which is characterized by homogeneity of cultures through embracing universal values and a common vision of social organization and control leading to internationality. Although Kayira wrote all his texts within the context of an emerging Globalization as a dominant social reality, this study has revealed that his gender, international exposure, race and ethnic background seem to have greatly influenced the manner in which he has narrated the Malawi nation to such an extent that his internationalist thrust is somehow undermined. This is reflected in his rather subjective selection of historical events and hostile engagement with the Chewa nationalism that has come to define the identity and character of the Malawi nation, and through the positive depiction of elements of modernity towards which the Malawi nation is edging.

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1.0 CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

"Folklore, fiction and music combine to produce and reproduce a sense of nationhood as national symbols produced by artists, historians and tv producers are more potent than nationalistic principles and ideology."

(Anthony D. Smith, 2000:72).

1.1 Literature and the Question of Narrating the Nation

Amongst the literary genres, the novel and to some extent, the (auto)biography, have become significant narratives in defining the nation as an "imagined community" since the two genres are apparatuses for expressing national identity due to their tendency of "[o]bjectifying national life and mimicking national structures" using symbols associated with the nation (Bhabha 2009:3). According to Gagiano (2004), what literature does is to shed light on what people of a particular period think of their society. In further highlighting the significance of literature in relation to nationalism, Brennan (2009) observes that the study of literature is in many ways profitable for understanding a nation as an imaginative vision. However, he argues that a nation in literature is presented as a myth since the imagination usually does not match the physical entity and there is no scientific way of establishing what is common among all nations. In narrating the nation, writers often highlight the ambivalent nature of the nation and its narration by engaging its dominant discourses and counter-discourses. This makes their narration a highly complex and political act.

Although literature's engagement with nationalism is indisputable, it must be acknowledged that different writers engage nationalism differently. While Andrade (2011) generally highlights the central place of nationalism in the African novel, she notes that the manner in which male and female African writers engage nationalism in their works is different. In this regard, she observes that male African novelists explicitly engage national politics whereas

their female counterparts tend to use the family as an allegory for the nation since they are excluded from the public life of national politics. She thus observes that in the novels by female writers, patriarchal authority within the family may represent the form of patriarchal authority observable in the larger community called the nation. Andrade generally advances the view that each nation can be narrated differently from the other and that the same nation can be narrated differently by different writers depending on certain factors such as gender, class or ethnic background of the author. In support of the central place of nationalism in African fiction, Jameson (1986) asserts that "[n]arratives from the Third World always contain within them a national allegory in such a way that even the private realm of the libidinal could be an exclusive metaphor for the public" (p.69). According to Jameson, this is so because the story of the private individual in such narratives is characterized by political tensions between tribes[1], classes and other categories of people which may be translated into love plots and romantic failures culminating into magical realism or even satire. This implies

[1] I am aware that the term "tribe" has been much debated especially with regard to its relationship with "ethnic group". For example, Southall (1970) states that he prefers the latter term to the former not because it offers greater analytical clarity but because it is devoid of the primitive connotations of the former. Other scholars view the two as not exactly the same. In my study, I have opted to use the term "tribe" because it allows the capture of emphasis on difference among groups in most African nation-states which the term "ethnic group" blurs. In Africa the terms "tribe" and "tribalism" continue to play an important role in people's everyday lives and speeches. Besides, the term "tribe" gives the connotation of continuity between pre-modern social groups to the present which such African groups reflect through their maintenance of clan names as an identity obtained at birth. The clan name is viewed as more important than any other group identity acquired later. Tribe rather than ethnic group fits the Malawian scenario better since it is predominantly rural but its people aspire for values that are universal hence although the term is associated with primitivism this aspiration cleanses it and makes it acceptable for usage. Although this act of linking the term "tribe" to the rural population is in line with the original usage of the term "tribus" by the ancient Greek Philosopher, Aristotle to refer to societies which were at a lower stage of "human civilization" or group of people with similar roots who always think in terms of "us" and "others", this later tendency is universal in as far as nations and other collectivities are concerned. Tribal people, even if they live in the city or are greatly "civilized", tend to have heterogeneous origins, are never de-tribalized but display great loyalty to their permanent roots (tribal ancestors) to which they often return after death. Interestingly, they aspire for the same values as non-tribal people such as respect for human rights, the rule of law and equality. All these characteristics typify the people of Malawi as represented in Legson Kayira's literary texts.

that both form and content should be regarded as valuable forms of signification in narrating the nation.

As indicated above, the novel and the auto-biography have been singled out as two fertile grounds for narrating the nation. However, not all novels or biographies narrate the nation. According to Prasad et al (2012), a narrative of the nation is the one which depicts the history of the nation within other stories; gives shape to the beliefs, aspirations and a sense of national identity; and its main character or specific space is a microcosm of the public or larger polity. As for Adams (2012), a national literature features what she calls "the problematic of the nation" centrally in its narration. In other words, it confronts the real political questions of the nation at a particular time. However, the idea of narrating the nation is a complex one as already pointed out because as Bhabha (2009) puts it, writers have to construct narratives that define the boundaries of their respective nations as they understand them. Bhabha's view implies that narrating the nation is different from merely "imagining" the nation and that the latter is a component of the former. In imagining the nation, the writer constructs the nation as it is perceived in official circles while in narrating the nation, the official stories are contrasted with competing stories within the narrative since the nation is a contested space.

In relation to the same, Cudjoe (2000) argues that "[to] imagine the nation is totalizing while to conceive of it in narrative terms acknowledges the fact that nation formation is always an incomplete process with varied and ambivalent cultural strands" (p.2). In the process of narrating the nation, the text exhibits what Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) refers to as heteroglossia, that is, the existence of stories that portray the nation as inhabiting multiple communities rather than presenting it as an entity characterized by sameness. Literature in Bakhtin's sense is a realm of 'the speaking subject' or a space of dialogue between histories, narratives and perspectives. In most cases, competing narratives and counter-narratives of the nation are

embedded within the story because the nation is an ambivalent, contested and unsettled construct (Bhabha, 2009). As a result, literature's engagement with nationalism is very political if not ideological. As Ngugi (1997) similarly argues, "narrative is an agent of history because it provides space for challenging the people's notions of national identity and ways in which power is deployed" (p.68). Ngugi further explains that "[a] literary text is a narrative of the nation when social relations in that text reflect and comment on those in society; when the text gets caught up in power struggles of the day and when it depicts the politics of the society" (p. ix). Some examples of politics of the society could be governance issues, questions surrounding national identity and citizenship just to mention a few. Ngugi's view is that all literary texts are political, a view shared by Frederic Jameson (1981) who similarly argues that in a literary text, everything is, in the final analysis, political. Jameson calls for prioritization of the political interpretation of a literary text over any other interpretive method. It therefore suffices to say that the narrative of the nation is a political act both in Ngugi's and Jameson's sense on the one hand, and in that advanced by Prasad et al (2012) and Adams (2012) on the other. However, in the act of narrating the nation, the particularities of the politics differ from one author to another as already alluded to due to the influence of the nationalist ideology held by the author and other factors.

The aim of this study is to investigate how Legson Kayira has narrated the Malawi nation across the colonial and early post-independence eras through his novels and autobiography, and to highlight key questions and ideas he is raising about Malawi's nationhood. Specifically I intend to examine how Kayira has interrogated Malawi's nationhood through his portrayal of the experiences of the tribe as a local community and engagement of the dominant discourses and counter-narratives of the Malawi nation as a means for asserting and sometimes questioning claims to collective identity, belonging to the land, national history and national character. While looking into Kayira's strategies for narrating the Malawi

nation, the write-up will show how Kayira engages the burning political questions about the Malawi nation otherwise known as "the problematics of the nation" (Adams, 2012) which his texts explore and highlight his vision or ideological stances regarding those "problematics". This is so because the study takes due cognizance of the fact that in narrating the nation, a literary author interrogates the nation in such a way that the relationship between the dominant narratives and other competing narratives inhabit implicit and sometimes explicit political statements mostly influenced by the author's nationalist ideology. The texts which I intend to study are: *I Will Try* (1965), *The Looming Shadow* (1967), *Jingala* (1969), *The Civil Servant* (1971) and *The Detainee* (1974).

I also outline the following supporting questions which are deemed as pivotal to this study: What is Kayira's conceptualization of the Malawi nation in his novels and autobiography? Although there is danger in relying on the image of the nation constructed by one author, such an enterprise is important for it gives an idea of how a specific author conceptualizes of his or her nation which may represent how a certain section of the society conceptualizes of that nation. In "Writing Ghana, Imagining Africa: nation and African modernity", Kwaku Larbi Korang (2004), for example, constructs the Ghana nation away from Eurocentric conceptualizations of the nation by including a wide range of West African perspectives that are largely ignored and neglected in the official imagimation of the nation. Similarly, in South Africa, analyses show that J.M. Coetzee's recent novel which Anne Gagiano analyzed leans towards a "white perspective" of the nation while Mandla Langa's novel, also analysed by the same critic, leans towards a black perspective of the same nation (Gagiano, 2004). The other question in this study is: What aspects of Malawi's past has Kayira utilized in his narratives of the nation and why? This question focuses on the historical construction of the nation as it helps to highlight aspects of the past that, in Kayira's view, have been instrumental in the construction and contestation of Malawi's nationhood. These experiences

could be those of the tribe or the citizens represented by the main characters. The next question is: How does Kayira critically engage or challenge the dominant discourses of Malawi's nationhood? This reflects the core spirit of narrating the nation whereby literary writers highlight the complexity and contested nature of the nation. The other question is: In what way do tradition (embodiments of the tribal culture) and modernity contribute to nation construction, sustenance and its contestation? This question recognizes the fact that some of the established features of the nation are carried over from entities from which the nation emerged in the spirit of ethnosymbolism and that there is usually conflict between established features and emerging trends championed by forces of western modernity both of which have an impact on how a particular nation is imagined. The question will help me to explore, for example, the county's national character reflected in Kayira's novels and autobiography. The final question guiding this study is: How has political oppression influenced nation imagination and its contestation bearing in mind that it has consumed much of Malawi's existence as a nation-state? This question is significant for it explores what happens to the imagination of the nation in an environment of political oppression and the complexity of nation narration such social reality poses.

1.2 Key Theories on Nation and Nationalism

It is important to point out on the outset that nationalism is so complex that no single theory can fully explain it. Anthony D. Smith (1986) considers nationalism as an ideological movement for "[a]ttaining and maintaining the autonomy, unity and identity of an existing or potential nation" (p.1). Nationalism is about people's sense of belonging to the land; it is about collective identity of the people who share a common culture and history to form their own nation, and it is also about self-determination as a people. The starting point of any nationalist project, Smith further argues, is people's awareness of their uniqueness as a group and their sense of belonging to or constituting a particular nation. In most cases, this

uniqueness is expressed in positive terms although it may also be expressed in negative terms such as historical victimhood. Anderson (2006) describes a nation as an imagined community since people develop national consciousness as they try to make social constructs out of their relationships with each other. Anderson expresses a modernist perspective of the nation which postulates that a nation is a modern creation associated with the industrial economy; its aim is to create a common sense of humanity that transcends cultural and tribal differences and it cannot develop outside of modernity. In short, a nation is viewed as contractual in nature as individuals and groups pursue their private interests. The modernists' views imply that a nation can be invented outside of a dynastic principle represented in the will of the people and not in the identities of race, language or territory. After all, it is an imagined community, a myth or distortion (error) of past social experiences (Brennan in Bhabha, 2009). Brennan avers that a nation is situational and not natural since it is formed out of the process of forgetting of acts of violence which the groups constituting it may have committed against each other in the past. The modernist interpretation has given rise to several brands of nationalism such as civic nationalism, political nationalism, feminist nationalism, liberal nationalism, economic and ultra-nationalism.

One assumption of the modernist perspective is that it is the economic standing which legitimizes a collection of individuals as a nation and not culture or any other factor. It also assumes that humans are always pursuing private interests which may be disguised as public interests. The approach is Eurocentric in nature for it links nationalism to The Industrial Revolution as its genesis and asserts that Europe provided models of nationalism from which other societies had to select (Charttejee, 1993). But is it really the resources people share or their economic connectivity which makes them members of a particular nation? Some theories explored later seem to dispute this assertion.

It must also be pointed out that while modernists take nationalism as an ally of modernity, most people in the formerly colonized lands view nationalism as an opposing force to modernity. In this regard, some African writers have, through their narratives, rejected or delegitimized their nations as they have been constructed through the colonial process (shaped by forces of modernity) in favor of other social orders associated with ethnicity. Wole Soyinka (1997), for example, has provided a scathing critique of the Nigerian nation-state in which he questions the very concept of a nation as it has been conceptualized and constructed in his country. Soyinka argues that a true nation can only emerge from below as the expression of the moral and political will of the indigenous people. Soyinka reiterates that in constructing their nations, the leaders of newly independent African states looked into their past, especially their tribal myths of creation, and in some cases, interrogated their history and meaning of their national identity (Soyinka, 1997). From Soyinka's perspective, the existing paradigms for conceptualizing the nation in Africa and other formerly colonized lands are very unsettling. In the same regard, Chatterjee (1993) charges that the manner in which nationalism is theorized in formerly colonized lands is flawed. Firstly, Chatterjee observes that the theories fail to recognize difference as an element on which formerly colonized peoples construct their collective identities. Secondly he observes that the existing paradigms of theorizing the 'imagined community' in formerly colonized lands is always done from the perspective of the colonizer and not the local people themselves (the formerly colonized people). The question of "whose imagined community?" which Chatterjee poses is relevant but not the only question that is yet to be settled although it is usually not immediately clear what the African communities imagine themselves as. This is true especially if we consider the important role which ancestors (the so-called "the domain of the inside" as a site of difference and resistance) plays in most African societies in defining a people.

From the foregoing, it is clear that some scholars do not agree with the modernist view of a nation. Primordialism is one such school of thought which challenges the modernist perspective. Primordialists argue that nationalism and nations existed even in the ancient times in form of kingdoms or other social forms of governance and control. Smith (1986), for example, argues that the modern nation is either a continuation or a re-creation of its old self but acknowledges that the idea of a nation as we know it today was born and nurtured in Europe. In relation to this point, Smith asserts that much as the old societies may have had nationalistic feelings, the ideology of nationalism was actually articulated in the nineteenth century in Europe from which it spread to other parts of the world. Primordialists generally think that a nation is an organic, natural entity whose existence is guaranteed by descent. From the primordialist interpretation, ethnocentrism and cultural nationalisms are born where a nation is chiefly viewed as an ethnic entity with a distinct culture and a homogeneous identity. One of the assumptions of primordialism is that the social conditions in Europe replicated themselves elsewhere for nationalism to take place outside of it (Gellner, 1983). One wonders whether it is possible for world events to follow the same pattern when there are cultural, economic and religious differences. The implication of the primordialist view of understanding nationalism is that it is western in its orientation and that it negates differences in realities between different parts of the world. The approach also implies that every nation can be traced to a precursor pre-modern society. But true to the primordialist assumptions, some modern nations continue to be founded on, and in certain cases, resemble their pre-national entities such as kingdoms from which they emerged. However, a strict primordialist interpretation of a nation does not completely match with realities on the ground in most parts of the world where nations are multi-racial, multi-ethnic and not static. This would make tracing a nation to a pre-modern entity almost impossible.

In Africa, the very idea of a nation seems to generate a different meaning from what the concept is associated with in the West in that a tribe carries the same meaning as a nation such that although people's allegiance to tribes is regarded as tribalism, it could as well be regarded as nationalism in the primordial sense. The word 'nation' can also carry the same meaning as region, continent and globe. Besides, most African nations have institutionalized tribal characteristics as an expression of the myths, memories, beliefs and customs of the nation. This reflects the ethnosymbolic interpretation of the nation. Ethnosymbolism as propounded by Smith (2009) is a school of thought which postulates that instead of concentrating on the origins of nations, the focus should be on the importance of symbols, myths, memories and values as these elements express nationalistic sentiments in the present and the past (also see Barrer, 2004). Ethnosymbolism recognizes the fact that these markers of nationalism may be modified with time and this thinking has elsewhere led to the birth of cultural nationalism and anti-colonial nationalism. However, a lot of scholars think ethno-symbolism stands on a weak theoretical footing for it places itself in between primordialism and modernism both of which have been accused of being Eurocentric in their orientation and are sharply opposed to each other. But on closer scrutiny the perceived weakness may actually be a strength on which an interpretation of formerly colonized nations can be founded. For example, the theory can account for the appeal of nationalism at any point in time since it is not bound by temporality (Smith, 2009). Since every society looks for elements that would define and bind its people through collective memory and symbols of collective existence, the mythic element of ethnosymbolism proves to be a valuable component in theorizing about nations and nationalism especially in Africa where people still tend to define themselves according to tribe as the primary form of identity which they use to claim their national identity.

There is yet another school of thought on nationalism which is called the postmodernist interpretation as propounded by scholars such as Homi Bhabha (1990), Stuart Hall (1992) and Jean-Francois Lyotard (1978) whose position is that a nation can never be tied to a specific point of reference as its origin and that the manner in which nationalism develops does not follow an objectively established pattern. To them, the meanings of a nation are multiple, contextual and complex. These facts imply that the approach rules out the possibility of tracing a nation to a particular dynasty or ethnic community and that the causes of the appeal and resurgence of nationalism differ from one context to another. The scholars advancing this view argue that a nation is ambivalent, unsettled and without a center. In the modernist thinking, the nation has a center in form of a common economic interest and can be defined in terms of the economy. With primordial conceptualization, the centre is the king or common ancestry but with postmodernism, its centre is non-existent and its identity is undefinable as it represents so many things some of which are contradictory to each other. To a postmodernist such as Walby (2003), nationalism transcends the modern nation and sets its focus on larger polity in the form of cosmopolitanism and internationalism since the main essence of a nation is the attainment of universal values. Postmodernist interpretation has given rise to consumer nationalism, cosmopolitanism, internationalism and postnationalism. The main challenge to this view lies in the continued character of foregrounding difference among nations of the world rather than sameness.

In this study, the use of the term “nationalism” will be a feeling of identifying oneself with an entity that is aspiring to become a nation or maintaining its status as a nation. Nationhood is the status of being regarded a nation. The study acknowledges that while the assumption during colonialism was that tribes in Africa would eventually be absorbed in the postcolonial nation, the process is far from being concluded as socio-political developments have led to the rise in ethnic consciousness as observed by Yewa (2001) and most recently by forces of

internationality. According to Nairn (1981), nationalism wears both negative and positive faces, thus both as the ideology of totalitarian regimes and emancipatory forces of the oppressed minorities. Nairn views nationalism as ambivalent by its very nature. For some scholars such as Smith (1986), nationalism is ethnic and cultural, implying that it is always present in the society and can manifest in people's everyday interactions at community and national level. This view is supported by Connor (1978) who argues that nationalism manifests in people's loyalty to the nation, state, tribe and even region at the same time. As a result, even the term "nation" is ambiguous, imprecise, inconsistent, and often times erroneously used. Further to that, while some scholars argue that African tribes are essentially nations, others argue against it and admit only a few such groups such as Zulu, Buganda and Ashanti tribes as nations. Worse still, some scholars object to the very idea of calling African countries 'nations'. They argue that these are nations still in the process of becoming. As for Chatterjee (1993) nationalism is both backward and forward looking (it is janus-faced), that is, it is both in-ward and outward-looking. The true meaning of nationhood is therefore hard to grasp. It would be safer therefore to assert that a nation is a process rather than an entity.

Some African intellectuals conceptualize nationalism as an ideology of the oppressed both during colonial era and after, hence reject the nation-state system completely (Soyinka, 1997). Usually, an African writer uses narrative to critique the manner in which a particular nation is perceived and presented officially. In narrating the nation, many stories may be told about a nation but writers always engage the dominant reality in order to validate their nationalist claims. A literary text may reflect one or both dimensions of nationalism as propounded by Nairn (1982), that is, the progressive force of the masses and the regressive force of state power and authority. The latter has been demonstrated by Buckley-Zistel (2009) in which even the official version of the Rwanda nation as a narrative is a critique of the colonial version of that country's history and identity. This may imply that most African

narratives of the nation are a critique of their nations as narratives. In short, such narratives are "political allegories" to use Fredric Jameson's words, and according to Bhabha (2009), authors create this political allegory by bringing their literary works in the realm of "conceptual indeterminancy" of the nation by which he means a strategy by which "[c]ompeting narratives undermine the historical certainty and settled nature of the nation" (p.292). As a result, the writer's choice and use of historical events or cultural symbols that form the counter-narrative to the dominant narrative of the nation make nationalism to be highly contextualized since the nature of the interaction among culture, politics and economics depends on the type of society. Therefore, the ideology of nationalism plays a central role in politics of narrating the nation in the sense that the type of nationalism may determine the nature of 'politics' in the author's act of narrating the nation.

Wa Thiong'o (1997) makes two important points which relate to writers' engagement with nationalism. Firstly he observes that the nationalist ideology portrayed in a particular literary text is a reflection of the people's collective reality and an embodiment of those people's way of looking at the world and their place in it. Secondly, he observes that writers try to persuade readers to make them see a certain reality but also to see that reality from a particular viewpoint (p.4-5). The two observations imply that everything about a particular nation which the reader is exposed to comes from the imagination of the author, hence from his or her perspective. Ngugi is not alone in suggesting the existence of 'politics' in narrating the nation in a literary text. Carrol (1987) is yet another scholar in this regard but he echoes Lyotard and Bakhtin in observing that a text contains dominant and minor narratives about the nation where the minor narratives challenge the dominant ones and show the possibility of another form of social organization, identity, national history or nationhood. Carrol further argues that this being the case, the political nature of the text cannot be ruled out or denied. The type of nationalist ideology expressed in the course of narrating the nation reflects the

author's view who selects which events to use and how to use them so that the narration achieves its desired goal. Therefore a literary text should be viewed as a space for discussion where opinions, ideologies and perspectives confront each other. In narrating the nation, what matters most is how the author has used nationalism as a political strategy or agency in debating and reconstructing the nation because as Hall (1993) argues, "[n]ationalism is capable of being inflected to very different political positions at different historical moments" (p.355). Since the writer gets involved in politics by the very act of writing the text, the question that needs to be answered is how does this politics manifest in Legson Kayira's act of narrating the Malawi nation?

1.3 Legson Kayira in the Context of Malawian Writing and the Development of the Country's Nationalism

This section provides a brief biography of Legson Kayira and a chronological presentation of his literary texts. It also highlights how his literary texts fit in the broader context of Malawian writing and the development of the country's nationalism from pre-colonial, colonial to post-independence eras.

Legson Kayira is considered one of the leading Malawian writers of long fiction judging by the number of literary texts which he has published in comparison to the others and the amount of scholarship his texts have attracted. He was a Tumbuka by tribe who left the country as a young man and wrote all his texts while leaving in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. As he was growing up, Legson Kayira physically experienced the subjugation of Africans by the colonial administration and witnessed the social transformations of the 1940s and beyond. He is a good subject of study for those who would like to understand how such socio-political environments influence people's national imagination. Although he wrote all his texts while in the diaspora, his writings are characterized by constant imaginative return to Malawi as the setting of all his literary works.

During his lifetime, Legson Kayira published the following literary texts whose contents I have put in the broader context of Malawian writing and the development of the country's nationalism: His first literary text is an autobiography titled *I Will Try*. In this text, Kayira has engaged the primordialist perspective of the nation to show that his Tumbuka tribe was a functioning society before colonization. He has also engaged the modernist perspective to interrogate the colonial formation of the Nyasa (Malawi) nation and its relevance in the wake of forces that operate at a global level. Kayira's second and third texts *The Looming Shadow* and *Jingala* respectively highlight the rather problematic relationship between tribe and nation. Here Kayira explores the ethnic character of the Malawi nation by pitting the nation against the principles of ethnosymbolism which a tribe embodies to account for the country's national identity and character. *The Civil Servant* followed and engages the woman image which the Malawi nation 'wears'. In this case the text interrogates the dominant narrative in which the Malawi nation is presented as a mother as reflected in the country's national anthem. In this text, ethnosymbolism is at play in interrogating the country's claims as a matrilineal society. Finally, *The Detainee* closed Kayira's literary output (published materials) and highlights how the alienation which oppression creates, forces people to question their belonging to the nation and how the legitimacy of the nation-state is constructed and contested under such a political environment. In that text the postmodernist view is evoked to interrogate the country's claims to nationhood that should ordinarily be characterized by self-determination. External interference and erosion of tribal ideals as a result of external forces and dictatorship are explored. Each of these texts contributes a particular aspect of nationhood which Kayira has engaged, and in the process, narrated the nation. Kayira's texts somehow authenticate, and in some respects, question the validity of Malawi as a nation, its assumed identity and character.

In Malawian literature, Legson Kayira belongs to what Banda and Kumwenda (2013) call "the Second Generation Malawian Writers" together with the likes of Aubrey Kachingwe and David Rubadiri whose period of writing largely coincided with the struggle for independence and therefore were mainly in the service of nationalism. Some Malawian texts such as *Nthodo* by Josiah Nthara have constructed a primordial, ethnic society but there are others such as *Mkwatibwi Okhumudwa* by P.P Litete and others which have constructed a modern (postcolonial) nation. Most Malawian novels have constructed and critiqued the kind of nationhood which the dictatorship of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the colonial rule which came before it had created. Examples of texts which fall into this category include *Sugarcane with Salt* by James Ng'ombe, *Sekani's Solution* by Tito Banda, Jack Mapanje and Steve Chimombo's collections of poetry and Du Chisiza Junior's collection of plays just to mention a few. These texts have interrogated Malawi's troubled nationhood by highlighting the implications of the country's colonial history, traditional ethnic cultures, modernity and Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship on national imagination. There are other texts which depict how the Malawi nation is imagined after the country became a multiparty democracy such as James Ng'ombe's *Madala's Grandchildren* in which the nation's identity and character is being influenced by universalist principles of citizenship, democratic ideals and social contract.

In Malawi, Legson Kayira's writing is also largely viewed as part of resistance writing against Dr Kamuzu Banda's rule which had amongst other things appropriated the country's history as a tool for entrenching his ethnic Chewa hegemony and building his own personal image (Mphande, 1996; Mkandawire, 2010). Since Kayira wrote all his novels while living in the United States of America (USA) and United Kingdom (UK) where he was exiled, some people have wondered as to whether categorizing Legson Kayira as a Malawian author is the correct thing to do since he never really lived in Malawi in his adult life. However, Mphande

(1996) observes that people in exile or diaspora usually have a spiritual connection with their homeland. This might have been the case judging by Kayira's consistent engagement with Malawi's history and his act of putting the problematics of the Malawi nation at the centre of his writing which coliqualify his works as narratives of the Malawian nation.

In this study, I would like to engage Legson Kayira's published novels and autobiography because of the light they throw on his imagination of the nation as a concept. There is a lot of literature depicting how authors have narrated their nations. However, most of this literature has concentrated on discussing how authors have depicted the family and its relationship to the nation with the view to highlight the counter-narratives that emerge as a means of questioning nationalist claims which familial experiences and legacies construct. On his part, Kayira has put the tribe at the centre of his writing. The study is therefore justifiable because the tribe which both constructs and contests the nation is central to African nationhood and its implications on national imagination, identity and character cannot not been overlooked.

The development of nationalism in Malawi dates back to the pre-colonial period when according to Lwanda (2000), the concept of Nyasa (later Malawi) identity included the Chewa concept of "mwinimudzi" or the owner of the land, usually a traditional chief who often ruled over his people with the help of a council of elders. This implies that the local people's nationalism was expressed through their sense of collective ownership of the territory they occupied. Lwanda reiterates that during colonial days, the Nyasa identity was constructed by migration of Nyasa people to neighboring countries to work and the John Chilembwe uprising of 1915. After independence, the identity is said to be constructed through the political and Christian culture instilled by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's rule and early missionaries respectively. Lwanda argues that even during the pre-colonial era, the Nyasa people were conscious of who they were as a collectivity. The significance of Lwanda's view is that it captures the common perception of what it means to be Malawian

and how that national consciousness has been constructed through history but his view raises a lot of problems some of which have been highlighted by Legson Kayira in his novels and autobiography. One such problem is the tendency of defining Malawianness with respect to the Chewa (Maravi) ethnic group as Lwanda has done when the country's territory and culture incorporates several other ethnic groups. The tendency of privileging the Chewa in defining Malawianness has also been pointed out by Nazombe (1983) and Kumwenda (2009) who also traced the idea of "Malawi" as a nation to the Chewa creation myth. Kayira's *The Looming Shadow* seems to trace the violent character of the Malawi nation to the traditional Chewa culture of the old that condones unjustifiable violence. The other texts such as *The Civil Servant* and *The Detainee* explore how problematic nation imagination has become in the era of globalization and the mixing of cultures, races and a focus on the pursuit of universal values that has come to characterize our modern societies. Such developments in national imagination and identity are inevitable since a nation is constructed, reconstructed and sustained on a time continuum in response to the changing social circumstances.

But by and large, Malawi's nationhood is shrouded in controversy since the country derives its name from Maravi, an ancient kingdom of the Chewa people to which other significant ethnic groups such as Yao, Lomwe, Tumbuka and Ngoni never belonged. While the Maravi or Chewa people migrated from the east, in particular from Katanga region in Congo, the Yao and the Lomwe migrated from the west in the present-day Mozambique and the "Ngoni" migrated from the south, thus Zululand in South Africa in particular. The Tumbuka are said to have migrated from Congo separately from the Chewa. Most of these tribes either fought tribal wars to conquer and control territory or used to raid on each other for slaves and ivory in the past. This makes the issue of collective imagination as a nation and collective memory and identity both possible and problematic. The tendency of tracing the Malawi nation to the Chewa creation myth has created a perception that some ethnic groups in the country are

more Malawian than others (Vail & White, 1989). As Matiki (2006:7) also observes, "[b]eing Malawian has often being equated to being Maravi (Chewa, Nyanja or Mang'anja) yet the country has several other significant ethnic groups which had never been part of the Maravi Kingdom". It must be emphasized that the relationship between literature and politics manifests in the manner in which a text represents the socio-political order, in this case, the nation-state and groups of individuals in it. However, in the case of Malawi's nationhood, the people's imagination of whom they are as a group (national self-consciousness and identity) or why their nation is constructed and conducts itself the way it does, have not been adequately explored.

The development of Malawi's nationalism as depicted in Legson Kayira's writing demonstrates that national identity and the meaning of Malawi have never remained the same but keep on shifting in response to the emerging social circumstances. As Gagiano (2004) observes, in both developed and developing countries, members continue to seek their own national definitions motivated by diverse factors. For the reason that Kayira is narrating the nation and not merely imagining it, in what way is his conceptualization and depiction of the nation different from that of Lwanda or Nazombe? We can take our cue from Kayira's contemporaries on the African continent such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka among others who have all engaged nationalism in their literary works. These authors were mainly influenced by the environment in which they grew up and wrote their literary texts. In their works, their nationalist ideologies shifted from acceptance of the nation-state formation imposed by colonialists to utter rejection of the same (Appiah 1992: 152). Their narration of the nation, therefore, is highly political and needs to be viewed, firstly as a critique of the manner in which the nation-state as a colonial project has been conceptualized and constructed in Africa and secondly as a re-construction of the nation motivated by diverse factors such as tribalism, the dysfunctional nature of the nation-state

project and even globalization. As Jackson (2002) puts it, storytelling is a modal form of social critique in which the storyteller's viewpoint shifts from one character or group to another and resists all claims to ultimate truth. There is no questioning the fact that the ideology of nationalism plays a central role in politics of narrating the nation whereby the type of nationalism determines the nature of politics in the author's act of narrating the nation since the author allows his nationalist ideology to bear upon his interrogation of the nation.

The decision to centre Kayira's writing was motivated by factors such as the range of his writing, his unusual life story and his 'progressive' pespectives on the idea of the nation. His texts show that the man was thinking ahead of his time through his gesturing of post-nationalism and confronting the gender question in African nation-state as early as 1970s when most of his peers were still conservative in their imagination of the African nation. Besides, Malawian prose has been neglected for a long time as scholars have often concentrated on poetry, folklore and drama. I have picked on the subject of nationalism and politics of narrating the nation because nationalism in Africa, according to the scholarly literature, is shrouded in ambiguity in the sense that it manifests in people's loyalty to the tribe, region, nation and larger polities such as continent and the world at the same time such that its true meaning is hard to grasp and its manifestations have often been misunderstood. Since nationalism is both inward and outward looking, nations 'wear' positive images as epitomes of collective achievement and pride yet their status as narratives may portray them in different light. The intended research is, therefore, significant because it has validated a widely held view that literary writing is essentially a "political act".

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The study has adopted postcolonial theory since nationalism in Africa following the colonial experience is viewed as a desire to recover lost pre-colonial identities the impossibility of which compels the people to construct some new identities, usually hybrid identities (Childs

& Williams 1997). Since writers in Africa and other formerly colonized lands attempt to recover or uncover the distorted world view of the formerly colonized people, the postcolonial approach considers them as foregrounding their oppositions to the assumptions, beliefs and perceptions of the colonial centre (Ashcroft et al 1989; Slemon 1991). Legson Kayira's manner of narrating the nation and constructing national identity and other elements of nationhood was therefore considered as a product of his colonial experiences and the kind of social order that he considered as appropriate in view of the interaction among tribal culture, history and forces of globalization. His critique of the manner in which the nation is conceptualized and constructed was viewed as stemming from his ethnic background and anti-colonial nationalism reflected in his literary works which have seen him adopting an oppositional approach to the widely held views about the modern Malawi nation. At the same time Kayira is critical of purely nativist and traditional forms of social organization. The postcolonial theory explains how formerly colonized people's perception of themselves is always in relation to "the other" that is defined with respect to ethnic, racial, regional and other forms of difference. Besides, the idea of the nation as we know it today and how it has been realized in Africa dates back to the colonial era where Africa was divided into nation-states by western powers. In that process, colonial boundaries were arbitrarily created without regard to tribal and regional interactions on the ground that marked the geographical boundaries of such entities prior to colonization.

In postcolonial theorizing, nationalist discourses have persistently attempted to project an image of a nation as containing multiple identities. Bhabha (1994) argues that in a postcolonial society, a nation is dispersed. Similarly, Anderson (2006) has questioned the existence of a concrete and unified identity in the wake of competing forces of 'the empire', local culture and globalization. These sentiments signal how contested a space the nation-state is and how complex the process of defining and characterizing the nation is.

Postcolonial discourses on nationalism help to highlight differences in perceptions concerning the nature of the contemporary nation-state between what is viewed as national discourse and the emerging or alternative discourses. The theory, therefore, helped me in identifying and understanding the dominant or official narratives and the competing narratives as markers of essentialism, ambivalence, otherness and hybridity all of which are aspects of the postcolonial theory.

Although in the contemporary African society, postcolonial approach is largely viewed as a means for recovering ethnic nationhoods against regimes whose intentions are to ultimately wipe them out, it also opens up new ways of thinking about the nation-state and about the nature of nations and nationalism especially with emerging globalization that challenges the boundaries of postcoloniality. But without going very far into critiquing postcolonial theory, I still found this theory appropriate since postcolonial discourses attempt to correct both Eurocentric and nativist conceptualizations of nations in the third world to imagine a reality beyond those two. In this regard, I found the theory appropriate for examining the representations and constructions of nations and nationalism as they pertain to formerly colonized people during colonial, independence eras and beyond.

In my analysis of Kayira's works, postcolonialism was regarded as both the aftermath of colonialism as well as the reaction to it. In reading Kayira's texts, both the author's portrayal of events, characters and the issues he is raising about nation-formation, its sustenance, belonging and national identity were viewed as a way of questioning established notions of the Malawi nation and its narration (official discourses). Hybridity was considered in determining the nature of the nation Kayira reconstructs in the wake of the interplay among native culture, neocolonialism and globalization as constructed through the dominant and competing narratives of the nation. This thesis has used a number of key concepts associated with postcolonialism through which events taking place in Kayira's literary texts and their

characters were scrutinized. These are the concepts which appeared to me to be appropriate tools for making sense of nationalist discourses while criticquing both Eurocentric and nativist conceptualizations of the nations. The first is Hegemony which is often described as the dominance of one social group over another which leads to a scenario where the dominating group influences, controls or exercises power over the subordinate group or nation not by force but by using indirect means such as 'consent'. The concept as used in Post-colonial theory and generally in Critical theory comes from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notes* written between (1929 and 1935). Chapter Two deploys this concept to discuss historical events that largely led to the construction of the Malawi nation as reflected in the personal experiences of Legson Kayira himself as a subject whose upbringing and decisions have been influenced by foreign ideologies acting on him which he accepts to be part of his personhood. Another concept, Ambivalence which is the simultaneous and contradictory attitude or feeling towards something is also used in this project. Specifically, the concept is used in Chapter Three where the nation-state is seen as a solution to so many social problems and yet it is detested by certain quarters of the society leading the society to belong to two competing definitions of what it is. Essentialism or belief that things have a set of intrinsic characteristics which define what they are is used in Chapter Four. Essentialism views an entity such as a nation or tribe as having cetain attributes or key defining featues that are central to its identity. In this project, Essentialism has been used in discussing tradition-related fixed attributes of Malawi's national identity that can be traced from tribal cultures which in one way or the other are responsible for people's resistance to emerging social phenomena that are bent on changing what is known about the Malawi nation. Appropriation is used in Chapter Five and by definition it refers to an act of taking something such as culture, art or anything that does not belong to you for your own use. If one can adopt, for example, images and styles from an earlier literary work and apply them in his or her work,

that adoption would be regared as Appropriation. In this chapter (Chapter Five), Appropriation is applied in dealing with how the nation, in Kayira's view, has utilized the woman image or that symbolization of the Malawi nation to conceal the true character of the nation. Hybridity and Globalization are also used in this project. Hybridity is where an entity inhabits two or more attributes such as cultural mixing of the west and eastern cultures, or African and European cultures in one individual and the concept is used in Chapter Six that deals with new cultural forms associated with the postcolonial identity. Finally, Globalization as a concept describes the process whereby individual lives and local communities are affected by economic and cultural forces or systems that operate world-wide (Ashcroft et al 1998). With Globalization, the local and international spaces co-exist, are interlinked and influence each other in complex ways through the international law, universalism and technology. This concept has been used in accounting for postnationality and transnationality (internationality) as it manifests in Kayira's writing.

1.5 Key Literature

The literature reviewed so far concentrates on how the nation has been conceptualized and narrated by African writers and those from other parts of the world. This literature is in two parts: the first part discusses how critics have analyzed the narration of the nation in Africa and other parts of the world. It also sheds light on how some authors have conceptualized the nation and how they have tried to link nationalism to politics of narrating the nation. There is the second set of literature which foregrounds Legson Kayira's literary works by highlighting the scholarship on his texts and showing how my study builds on them, and how different it is from those previous studies.

1.5.1 How Nations in Africa and Other Parts of the World have been Conceptualized and Narrated

In narrating Kenya as a nation, the dominant narrative concerns land as an economic and cultural asset in the wake of capitalism and neo-colonialism. It also centres on common historical experiences and certain cultural rituals that are dominant among Kenya's diverse ethnic groups. Prosansak (2004) in "Imagining the nation in Ngugi's fiction" notes that Ngugi has singled out particular historical events and some traditional customs to construct the collective consciousness of the people of his country, Kenya. For example, Prosansak observes that in *The River Between,* Ngugi has constructed national consciousness around the cultural ritual of circumcision as a source of collective identity; in *A Grain of Wheat* such a consciousness is constructed around the historic Mau-Mau war of liberation against the British colonialists and in the other texts, it is the Kikuyu creation myth which authenticates the Kenyan people's claims to land and collectivity. But he observes that in later novels, Ngugi delegitimizes the nation. In addition, the critic notes that exploitation diminishes the dominant narrative of Kenya as a nation. Prosansak's interest is in imagining the nation, hence his study takes no trouble to highlight the text's competing narratives which contest the dominant narratives. Neither does it highlight the texts' nationalist ideology since there is a remarkable difference between narrating and imagining the nation. But Ogude (1999) in his study noted that Ngugi's first three texts portrayed modernist and primordialist nationalism at the same time. This is so because Ngugi's nationalist ideology is centered on the Kenyan nation-state as a postcolonial construct which subscribes to modern notions of progress and development on the one hand and constructs the nation around the Akikuyu creation myth on the other. These kinds of nationalism imply that Ngugi's conceptualization of the nation is contradictory since a nation to him is both a modern invention associated with colonialism and something which emerged from antiquity. Ogude (1999) like Prosansak (2004) observes

that Ngugi's nationalist ideology revolves around the land question where the dominant narrative is that the land was given to the Kenyan people through their ancestors, a factor which makes land a spiritual right of the Kenyan people. However, unlike Prosansak, Ogude notes that Ngugi's novels contain a counternarrative which depicts land as a contentious and divisive issue contrary to ideals associated with it in the Akikuyu creation myth. Alongside land as a God-given commodity is another narrative that Kenyans are descendants of one family, that of Gikuyu and Mumbi implying that they are all related hence are united. But there are competing narratives to this too which portray the Kenyan society as fraught with conflicts as ethnic hatred is rife in the country. Both Ogude and Prosansak's analysis show that the author's nationalist ideology is actively used in the act of narrating the nation. They further show that the history, rituals and myths which Ngugi has used in his texts as tools for constructing the nation are responsible for uniqueness as a group, positive legacy and are sources of collective pride.

In his analysis of *Petals of Blood*, Uraizee (2004) concluded that Ngugi is advancing the construction of an ideal "natio" as an alternative social order to the nation-state in postcolonial Africa. In its original sense, "natio" is a local community of one's birth constructed on the basis of social harmony and economics in which wealth is based on the amount of labor put in, and where the peasants, labourers and some intellectuals control the means of production (Ogude 1999). But "natio" as originally conceptualized by Timothy Brennan is a primordialist entity from which the nation emerged in the eighteenth century. It is therefore a traditional kind of establishment similar to a kingdom or chiefdom. Although Ngugi has qualified this "natio" as an ideal "natio", he is yet to explain how practically such a social organization could be governed. In describing this "natio", however, Ngugi in *Writers in Politics* states that once realized, the people will have to reconnect themselves to the

physical, spiritual, cultural and linguistic roots of the "natio" and he envisages "natio" as potentially free from corruption and discrimination.

What can be discerned from this "natio" is that the peasants, labourers and some intellectuals will be working collaboratively in governing it. By implication, Ngugi is advocating the dissolution of the Kenyan nation-state into smaller communities. The problem with this proposition is that it leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Uraizee (2004) on her part has, for example, lamented that Ngugi's idea of "natio" as a proposed social order is left incomplete. Uraizee has further observed that *Petals of Blood* has presented multiple and competing stories which narrate the nation some of which dispute claims to national unity, collectivite existence and geographic space (territory). She avers that Ngugi is suggesting that the narrative of the nation is misleading and could be replaced by those of local communities. Another interesting point highlighted by Uraizee (2004) is that the dominant and competing narratives of the nation can sometimes be metaphorically and symbolically conveyed by using images such as that of the barren wasteland in *Petals of Blood*. In short, Uraizee's analysis shows Ngugi's nationalist ideology is a vehicle for narrating the nation through its complex and competing stories and also through form. Ngugi himself in *Writers in Politics* admits that his main aim in *Petals of Blood* was to portray the impracticality of the national structure created by colonialism.

Dismissal of the nation-state has been a common phenomenon among prominent pioneer African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka. In his analysis of Chinua Achebe's novels and autobiography, Aghogho (2014) demonstrates that Achebe's nationalist ideology has been changing from that of accepting postcolonial Nigeria as a nation to that of rejecting it, an observation similarly made by Msiska (2014) in which he argues that Africans reject the colonially constructed nations and search for alternative and true nations. Aghogho notes that while Achebe's earlier novels show remarkable tolerance

with the nation-state as a means of social organization, in his later novels, particularly *Anthills of the Savannah,* Achebe has narrowed his view of the nation by limiting its scope to an ethnic group or region. Achebe's act of narrowing down the nation to an ethnic group is in tandem with the original meaning of tribe as nation in Africa before colonialism as observed by Curtin (1966). Aghogho ascribes this act by Achebe to what he terms cultural nationalism. Aghogho further notes that in using cultural nationalism, Achebe has dramatized family and compound life in his earlier novels by using them as figures of the community and by implication, the nation. He warns that Achebe's narratives may equally represent his critique of traditional forms of social organization, implying that even Achebe is ambivalent in his conceptualization of the nation. Achebe's act of deliberately using the village to represent the community and nation in his earlier works, or that of pitting the local narrative against that of the nation in later works to question claims to collectivity, is an indication that narrating the nation is a highly political exercise. This is so because through this act, Achebe's narrative serves a political agenda of fostering separatism (Aghogho 2014). Aghogho reiterates that all writers who indulge in narrating their nations are engaged in an act of rewriting the nation but he emphasizes that individual writers have their own ways of re-telling the nation as they engage their countries' nationhood depending on their interpretation of events. As Gagiano (2004) also argues, a novel is a politically significant genre since in expressing a particular identity it may align itself with a particular group to serve that group's political impulses or intentions. A novel can also yield to nationalist pressure and serve as a tool for legitimating a homogenizing state agenda. In this regard, Gagiano (2004) concurs with Ogundele (1995) in explaining the political nature of narratives by indicating that politics manifests in the relationship between the depictions of the local community in relation to the nation. As Ogundele (1995) puts it, where the relationship is metonymic such as where the description of the local stands for the entire nation, the writer's political agenda would be different from

a scenario where the description or story of the local has an oppositional relationship with that of the nation. But Achebe just like Ngugi has emphasized genealogies of heroes and their achievements at tribal level as pillars on which collective pride and identity at national level are constructed.

The political nature of narratives is further highlighted by Udumukwu (2011) in his analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* where he points out different ideological and political perspectives regarding the governance of the Nigerian nation embedded in the novel. Udumukwu notes that Adichie's novel is a ground of dispute and debate which manifest in the act of documenting the formation and reconfiguration of the Nigerian nation. Similarly, in her analysis of how three leading South African authors have narrated the so-called the rainbow nation, Gagiano (2004) insists that the narration is so diverse with some employing what can be described as primordialist kind of nationalism and others using modernist forms of nationalism to account for the persistent problem of class difference in the South African society. One observation Gagiano makes is that the South African authors have counter-argued the popular depiction of blacks as victims, or that coloureds were rejected by both blacks and white societies during Apartheid. The critic notes that the authors depict the South African society as shifting towards multiculturalism. She identifies the dominant narratives and shows how these narratives are discredited by using evidence drawn from the competing narratives. Therefore, the thinking that a text could portray only one type of nationalism in accounting for collective identity could be illusory. But what is clear is that all narratives of the nation confront key political questions rocking a nation. In this connection, Adams (2001) argues that due to the imposition of the nation-state system on some countries, there are gaps, cracks and contradictions clearly visible in most countries on the African continent. As such, writers are compelled to preoccupy themselves with what she calls "the

problematics of the nation" in their narratives of the nation to refer to key political questions rocking the nation.

In Israel, belonging to the land and conflict over identity have consistently been depicted as the two key political questions of that country often represented through allegory. According to Benard (2013) who analyzed literary works of three major Israeli authors, the allegories challenge the dominant Israeli perception of national identity. In Benard's view, the juxtaposition of competing stories transforms the narratives into political platforms for dialoguing opposing perspectives on belonging, nationhood and citizenship between Israelis and Palestinians. The author further notes that while Palestinians look at the Jewish State as a settler colonial state, the Israelis conceive of their nation in cultural and ethnic terms and that the latter have constructed narratives that diminish Palestinian experiences and claims. The narration of the Israeli nation, is therefore, championed through ethnic nationalism of a primordial kind on the part of Israelis and a modernist kind of nationalism on the part of the Palestinians, each side using their kind of nationalism as a political strategy in asserting certain claims such as belonging and identity. What is more, each side constructs the nation based on historical or mythical victories of their ancestors that settled in the area and emphasize uniqueness, positive legacy and group pride.

The link between nationalism, narration of the nation and national identity is best demonstrated by Damforth (2001) whose study looked at how soccer in Australia creates narratives for contesting the country's national identity and how such narratives are used for negotiating what precisely it means to be Australian. His analysis shows that within narratives of Australian soccer, there are competing narratives and counter-narratives of the Australian nation itself. One narrative, the dominant narrative, postulates that Australia is a former British colony made up of a white English speaking majority. But this narrative is contested by another narrative which posits that Australia is a multi-cultural nation of diverse

languages. Even this second narrative is contested by yet another one that tries to depict Australia as a hybrid nation. The critic has categorized the narratives into ethnic, national and transnational narratives depending upon the kind of identity each one is promoting as a way of highlighting the problem of national unity. In effect, Damforth's analysis shows that there is a link between the category of the narrative, the kind of identity being promoted and the form of nationalism at play. The forms of nationalisms identified include the traditional ethnic nationalism, the multicultural nationalism and the postmodernist nationalism. This implies that the driving force of any national narrative whether dominant or not is the nationalist ideology at play in the particular society and the writer's own ideology. This observation echoes Bhabha (1990) view that narrating the nation is a dialectic process whereby stories reflecting different nationalist ideologies compete with each other within the narrative for a dominant position in the public discourse based on the political aims at play.

A case of showing a narrative as inhabiting the political aim of the writer has partially been highlighted by Christiansen (2004) in her analysis of Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda.* Christiansen sees ethnic African nationalism at play in Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* where the problematic of the story centers on the indigenous people's rights to the land of their ancestors. To her, Zimbabweans during the struggle for independence (which the novel depicts), saw themselves mainly as Africans and used that kind of 'black nationalism' to respond to the racist spatial discourse in a political manner. The author further notes that versions of the country's liberation war in Zimbabwe have become a site for struggle over the definition of Zimbabwean national identity by plotting the boundaries of Zimbabwean nationhood. In this regard, the critic observes that *Nehanda* offers a different version of the nation's history and that it can therefore offer a different perspective to that of the official political discourses in defining Zimbabwean national identity. At the same time the critic is able to identify feminist nationalism at work in the novel which is creating narratives of difference. In constructing

Zimbabwe's national identity and history, Vera emphasizes positive attributes of the black people, bravery of men and women and the power of the ancestors which manifested and led to victory in the liberation struggle.

1.5.2 An Overview of the Existing Scholarship on Legson Kayira's Literary works

This section provides an overview of the scholarship that exists on Legson Kayira's writing with the principal aim of putting my study in the context of the existing literature. The reviewed Literature on Legson Kayira's literary texts point to the fact that different scholars have considered different aspects in Kayira writing such as: Kayira's use of history; the idea of imagining the nation; his preoccupation with the conflict between tradition and modernity in the postcolonial social realty, the role of the comic in his writing, and use of the child motif. These aspects have been tackled in isolation by one scholar or another and reflect the scholars' diverse interests and approaches to the literary texts by the author under study.

There has been considerable interest in how Legson Kayira has used history. Kamlongera (1983), for instance, has described Kayira's writing as very passionate with history and he has pointed out that Kayira's literary works depict a number of incidents which echo real events in the history of Malawi. Kamlongera advises that scholars on Kayira's writing ought to understand that they are dealing with a writer who is attempting to re-discover and re-evaluate his nation's history in an effort to assert collective identity, and that he is preoccupied with the problem of representation of his country's pre and post-colonial history. He reiterates that Kayira is passionate about what has become of Malawianness and the native culture in the wake of colonialism and Dr Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship as the two major historical events that have had a huge bearing on the country's national identity. A similar observation has been made by Moslund (2003) who observes that Kayira has used the past to deliver important facts about Malawi's pre and post-colonial history in a manner that

often challenges the official records. Since the nation is imagined and narrated in historical terms, Buckley-Zistel (2009) advises that what matters most is how a writer like Legson Kayira has interpretated the events that happened in the past and how he has used that interpretation to posit new knowledge about the nation. Additionally, Ross (2012) has observed that Kayira's autobiography entitled *I Will Try* provides a counter-narrative to Kamuzu Banda's well publicized narrative of his long walk to the mines in South Africa. Ross emphasizes that in a country such as Malawi where national history has been twisted and in certain cases suppressed, it is through personal stories like Kayira's autobiography that people derive some insights into the nation's suppressed history. All these studies have offered valuable illumination in my analysis of how Kayira has used history as a political tool in narrating the Malawi nation.

On Kayira's engagement with the national idea, Sagawa (2006) concluded in her study that Kayira's literary works are preoccupied with the development of nationalism. This statement has been supported by Ross (2012) who observes that Kayira's autobiography titled *I Will Try* provides a counter-narrative to the official discourses about the Malawian nation born out of the colonial experience. This is related to the observation made by Shara (2002) who argues that Kayira's literary works have lingering questions about the postcolonial Malawi nation although he has incorporated some aspects of modernity in his writing. Kayira's nationalist ideology could, therefore, be worked out from his ambivalent representation of the nation or as something which changes across his novels and autobiography.

Similarly, Vavlov (1965) in his review of *I Will Try* observes that the publication of Legson Kayira's autobiography, *I Will Try* coincided with the formation of nation-states in the sub-Saharan Africa. Vavlov, therefore, asserts that the question of nationhood is central in the autobiography and Kayira's later literary texts but Vavlov's study, just like all the other studies highlighted above, never intended to explore the issue of nationhood as its main

focus. Suffice to say that none of the previous scholars have systematically studied how Kayira's texts collectively construct and in some respects contest his country's nationhood although they have hinted at the author's passion for the idea of the nation in one text or the other. This gap in knowledge is the one my study would like to fill. On nationalism and national identity, Meenakshi (2003) and Roscoe (1977) have explored Kayira's employment of the child motif as a tool for searching the country's identity which is considered the main problem the country faces. Roscoe (1977) has gone further to consider Kayira's act of raising questions about morality and culture especially as the country was slowly shedding off its rural identity image during the time Kayira wrote his earlier texts. This followed the demise of the colonial nation of Nyasaland and the subsequent rise of the new post-colonial nation-state called Malawi.

Some scholars have been interested in the element of form in Legson Kayira's literary texts. In this regard, several scholars such as Jackson (1983), and Vajda and Gerald (1986) have attested to the fact that Kayira's literary works are generally constructed on the principle of the comic, using forms such as mockery, irony, ridicule, humor, satire and the grotesque to interrogate both tradition and modernity as markers of nationhood. Jackson (1983), for instance, highlights Kayira's use of the satiric mode in depicting both sets of leaders: traditional chiefs and government officials in the manner that ridicules their display of power and authority, and the systems they represent. This implies that Kayira's choice and use of the satiric mode is done with political aims. Satire is known as an art form (device) which shows readers what is bad and why (Griffin 1994), hence it does not only play a role in constructing the values but also projecting the kind of nation the author imagines. To affirm this fact, Griffin (1994) further observes that satire plays a role in reconstructing the nation for it evaluates the validity of the county's claims to nationhood. Sometimes an author's use of satire may question the nationalist project by using distorted images of the nation through

negative depiction of its representatives such as negative depiction of the family, national figures, national history and others while proclaiming the ideology of nationalism. As for Vadja and Gerald (1986), Kayira's act of satirizing of both tradition and modernity opens up a window on his concept of life, world view and nationalism. According to these critics, there are instances where Kayira seems to condemn the traditional social order but at times he portrays it in good light. He does the same with the modern social order. It is argued that through this act, the reader can discern Kayira's nationalist ideology for as Devardhi and Nelson (2012) argue, modernity and tradition are often the dichotomy through which characters in a text search for their identity. As Wafula (2011) warns, the relationship between tradition and modernity needs to be looked into more carefully because the two can manifest at the same time in society giving rise to two different sets of nationalisms.

While acknowledging that what is central in Kayira's texts is the conflict between tradition and modernity, previous scholars have only gone as far as looking at Kayira's use of satire in condemning either tradition or modernity without linking his depiction of tradition and modernity through satire to nationalism and politics of narrating the nation. This study wants to take a step further by looking at how tradition and modernity are related to nation-construction and sustenance in Kayira's texts since a nation is both a modern construct as well as something which draws its existence on tradition.

The most recent scholarship to which this study belongs seems to be interested in the Kayira's progressive ideas that go beyond the idea of the nation. Scholars like Msiska (2017) have signaled Kayira's interest in transnationality. The main advantage my study has over the previous studies on Kayira's literary works lies in the fact that mine has taken on board all of Kayira's published literary texts and has focused on the element of narrating the nation of which imagining the nation which has been the preoccupation of the previous scholars is a mere component.

1.6 General Approach and Chapter Layout

In terms of methodology, one or two aspects of nationhood have been explored in one text where the issues appear to be dominant and important in Legson Kayira's politics of narrating the Malawi nation. This has allowed for an intensive examination of such issues. Since Kayira has placed his tribe or local community at the centre of his writing, I have, therefore, adopted Globalization to explore the complex relationship that exists among the tribe, the nation and the world as represented in Kayira's literary texts. Globalization emphasizes homogeneity of cultures in which the nation tries to harmonise its tribal cultures into a single national culture while the international communities works against such essentialising tendencies of both the nation and the tribe. Internationality as a hallmark of Globalization promotes the adoption of universal values, practices and standards inorder for a particular collectivity to be accepted as a member of the international community. In the spirit of Globalisation, the relationship between the tribe and the nation is said to be marked by essentialism and strategic essentialism where the latter is seen as a temporary group identity that some scholars think is pragmatically minimized to support the identity of the dominant ethnic group in the process of constructing a national identity but other scholars, supported by the reality in most African countries, dispute such a view. Therefore, in reading Legson Kayira's texts, essentialism and strategic essentialism have had a bearing upon my examination of the endless interaction between ethnicity and nationhood especially those aspects or experiences that make the tribe construct and contest the nation. This is important because in examining the experiences of the tribe and how these experiences intertwine with national ones, questions pertaining to national identity, citizenship, national territory, national history, character and other aspects of nationhood may arise. Generally, I have adopted what might be termed a historicised textual analysis in which I have gone back and forth from text

to the world outside it, in ways that demonstrate how the novels and autobiography evidently serve as articulations of Malawians' concerns about the nature of their Post-colonial nation**.**

Fredric Jameson (1986) insists that postcolonial literatures be read as national allegories. Although some critics have accused Jameson of over-generalization, I find his advice appealing as regards politics of narrating the nation hence in reading Kayira's texts such as the autobiography, *I Will Try*, some of the experiences of the protagonist and other characters in their ethnic contexts have been projected onto the nation-state level to see how they construct and contest Malawi's nationhood. This is in recognition of the fact that literary texts reflect and critique the national contexts from which they emerge. The texts have been read as allegories of the Malawi nation where hegemony and counter-hegemony determine the nation's sustenance and contestation as reflected in the conflict between tradition and modernity. This approach has helped me to identify key aspects and experiences of the tribe which promote and diminish the Malawi nation as it has been constructed through the colonial process. Essentially I have considered how Kayira has used the tribe, its historical experiences and character enshrined in its traditional culture to assert and sometimes question issues such as belonging to Malawi, national identity, citizenship, national history and national character.

The first chapter is an introductory chapter that aims at understanding nationalism and its role in politics of narrating the nation. The chapter discusses the ideology of nationalism and how a nation has been conceptualized and narrated in formerly colonized nations in Africa and beyond. This chapter, therefore, highlights how some writers of fiction, though randomly selected, have engaged the ideology of nationalism in narrating their nations. The aim is to map out the manner in which writers are influenced by nationalism and the dimensions of its usage in the process of narrating the nation. It highlights common tendencies observed among writers who are deemed to have narrated their nations. The chapter also introduces Legson

Kayira, the author whose texts have been analyzed by putting his writing in the broader context of Malawian literature and the development of the country's nationalism.

The other chapters are organised in terms of the chronology of the publication of Kayira's works, but, as the thesis explains also corresponds to the major periods in the development of the Malawi national consciousness, thus, providing an insight in the shifts and continuities in Kayira's own thoughts on the idea of the Malawian nation and the challenges of narrating it in fact and fiction. Hence, Chapter Two is titled "Re-enacting the Historical Construction of the Malawi Nation through a Personal Life Story". The chapter highlights aspects of Malawi's past that have been instrumental in the construction and contestation of Malawi's nationhood in the autobiography, *I Will Try.* These experiences are either those of the tribe or the individual represented by the main character, Legson Kayira himself. In this chapter, the tribe from which Legson Kayira hailed and in which he grew up is used as a site where national history is enacted and national consciousness and territory are explored. The analysis has focused on how Kayira's ethnic background and personal experiences are used as a means for interrogating issues associated with Malawi's nationhood, especially national history and national territory. For example, the chapter has explored how certain events reflected in the local area led the people to start thinking of themselves as a collectivity and to form a nation. Since both colonialism and nationalism suppress tribal and local histories, the text is seen to question and wrestle with official accounts regarding Malawi's nationhood, hence creates some counter-discourses which help uncover certain aspects of nation-formation which have been overlooked or silenced by the dominant narratives of the nation. The text gives readers glimpses into how Kayira thinks the past has been used to construct the modern Malawi nation. Firstly, histories of nation-formation embedded in Kayira's life story or autobiography have been identified and their deployment analyzed to come up with counter-discourses. Secondly, Kayira's engagement with history has been analyzed against

the backdrop of two competing perspectives of the nation during his time namely: the primordialist and the modernist perspectives. This is so because the text was written within the context of nationalist struggle for independence when an opportunity had opened up for the natives to define who they really were as a people in the face of imposed colonial boundaries, oppression and engulfing modernity. The aim is to show how the formation of the Malawi nation could be understood through the experiences of the tribe. The chapter has, in the process, shed light on the functioning of personal life history as well as tribal historiography in the narrative of the nation since the text draws the readers' attention to the way in which the experiences of the tribe and those of the individual on the time continuum relate to nation construction and its contestation.

In Chapter Three titled "National Identity and Politics of Belonging to the Nation in *Jingala*" I discuss how Kayira has tackled the issues of national identity and belonging to the nation as important aspects of nationhood. These are explored through the various discourses of national identity which the novel highlights and questions using the child motif and the actions and experiences of the protagonist, Jingala. In an ideal nation, the people's collective identity as reflected in common values, beliefs and aspirations form the basis of the manner in which a society is organized and what its national character is. However the novel, *Jingala* demonstrates that the main character's values, beliefs and aspirations are at odds with how the nation-state is organized and the sort of things it values. Jingala's death is, therefore, symbolic of the killing of the inner self at the hands of forces of modernity through which the postcolonial Malawian nation is constructed.

Chapter Four explores the role of myth, ritual and ethnicity in imagining the nation and constructing its character, in particular, the paternalistic character of the postcolonial Malawi nation. It demonstrates how Legson Kayira critiques the character of the nation by challenging its assumptions and exposing the physical and psychological violence it promotes

at local society level that have come to characterize the Malawi nation-state project as a mode of social organization and control meant to guarantee unity, justice, equality and protection of the people. This violence and exploitation is presented as rooted in the country's Chewa ethnic culture and is reflected in the myths and rituals that have been used to construct the nation such as the Chewa Creation myth and its associated rituals like the witch-identification ritual of with the character Mushani in *The Looming Shadow* is a victim. The novel itself focuses on the difficulties and opportunities of building the Post-colonial state characterised by the cultivation of the idea of one-nation state conceived in terms of values and beliefs of the dominant ethnic group – the Chewa. The chapter, therefore, explores the relationship between the tribe and the nation to show how the socio-economic realities, the jealousies, divisions and violence associated with traditional beliefs of Chewa tribal life which the novel highlights have given rise to the kind of nation that Malawi is.

Chapter Five is titled "Unmasking the Rhetoric of Mother Malawi". This chapter discusses how Legson Kayira has utilized the feminine representation of the Malawi nation as a mother in *The Civil Servant* to interrogate particular issues of citizenship, patriotism and endemic exploitation of the people through the experiences of the enduring woman as a wife and mother. In *The Civil Servant*, Kayira engages the mother image of the nation to expose the true reality which that rhetoric masks thereby challenging the country's stutus as a matrilineal society. There are also strong indications that Kayira is questioning the dominant construct of the Malawian nation that portrays it as a nation for black people by framing love stories which cross racial, class and national boundaries. This is done to challenge boundaries and histories that govern the country's image which the Malawi nation imagined as a mother in Chewa nationalist terms seems to project.

Chapter Six is titled "Nation-imagination in the Context of a Dictatorship: Crossing the Boundaries of the Nation towards a Common Humanity." The chapter explores Kayira's

effort of constructing the nation based on universal values and common humanity. It concentrates on the theme of legitimacy of the Malawi nation-state as a collectivity by examining the role of external bodies in nation construction, recognition and contestation in *The Detainee*. In this novel, Kayira signals his post-nationalist thinking by depicting the Malawi nation as being demarcated but with open borders since some of the government's actions are being questioned both locally and internationally. In the novel, the external pressure and influence to which the government succumbs are a clear indication of the precarious state of the modern nation as an entity in world affairs and of its limited powers and authority. The school of thought of postmodernism is employed to interrogate the existence of the Malawi nation in the wake of external interference and loss of national culture due to external forces. The focus is on the theme of political oppression perpetrated by Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship and how Kayira has used it to highlight what happens to nation imagination in such an environment.

Chapter Seven presents a conclusion on the manner in which Kayira has narrated the Malawi nation and the politics of his narration by making key observations in line with the aim of the study and the research questions. The chapter also suggests issues for future research that directly emanate from the study.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: Re-enacting and Contesting the Historical Construction of the Malawi Nation through a Personal Life Story in *I Will Try*

"People who constitute a nation must have been living on the same territory, had spoken the same language and had transported an original culture down the ages… losing the nation in the mist of time poses a major problem."

(Berger, 2009)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights aspects of Malawi's past that have been instrumental in the construction and contestation of Malawi's nationhood in the autobiography, *I Will Try*. The analysis has focused on how Kayira's personal experiences have been used as a means for constructing and interrogating aspects of Malawi's nationhood particularly national consciousness, national history, and national territory. This chapter draws on James Olney's (1993) ideas on the African autobiography as a collective narrative. In Olney's view, an African autobiography generally tells a communal story although on the surface it may seem to be narrating the life story of an individual since the story of the autobiographer intertwines with that of the nation through selective memory of significant events that may have shaped his or her life and that of the community (nation). I use Olney's views to read Kayira's *I Will Try* as a buildungsroman of both Legson Kayira and the Malawi nation. In this regard, the selection and combination of events in *I Will Try* give us a glimpse into how Kayira thinks the past has shaped and disputed Malawi's nationhood.

Before discussing how Kayira has used the genre of autobiography to highlight issues to do with Malawi's nationhood, I provide a summary of story of *I Will Try* as follows: Legson

Kayira was born around 1938 in Mpale, Chitipa in Malawi. His precise birth date was not recorded as his parents did not know how to read and write. Kayira was born during the time of migration as villages, and in some cases entire clans, were moving from one area and settling in another for want of more space or fertile soils.

As far as his early life is concerned, the first name given to Legson at birth was "Didimu". This name reminded his relatives of the past event in which Legson was miraculously saved from drowning by a passer-by when his mother allegedly dumped him in the nearby Didimu stream when he was a baby but was fortunately saved by a certain woman who passed by the spot just in time. Most of his siblings died in succession in their infancy and their deaths were attributed to acts of witchcraft. There were persistent fears that Didimu himself would be the target of some witches from which he needed protection. Kayira's family, like any other family in the area, had a family witchdoctor as there were no hospitals in those days. As a young boy, Legson used to take cattle and goats for grazing in the bush with his playmates and occasionally took part in communal hunting for wild animals which were in abundance in his area. His early childhood life can therefore be summarized as unsophisticated, stable and contented with who he was as a member of the Tumbuka tribe and the immediate local environment.

But things changed dramatically when Legson Kayira started schooling in 1946. The first school he went to was a junior primary school at Mpale that went only up to grade three and he later went to a higher junior primary school, Wenya which was about eight miles from his village. This was the time of the fight for independence and of major global events such as the Second World War, the general competition for supremacy between communism and capitalism (the Cold War) and the growth of nationalism in many parts of the world. It was while at Wenya Primary School that he changed his name from Didimu to an English-sounding name, Legson. The practice of changing names amongst the youth from African

names to English-sounding ones was fashionable at that time and symbolizes a broader yearning for colonial definitions, aspirations and identity by the colonized subjects. Later Legson moved to Nthalire to complete his primary school education where senior classes had been introduced. He found himself foster parents in a nearby village with whom he stayed during the period he was schooling at Nthalire. Around that time, Legson lost his father back home who died after falling from a tree and his death exerted enormous pressure on him to quit school and look after his widowed mother and orphaned siblings although he was also a child. He resisted that pressure but worked hard in school and got selected to Livingstonia Secondary School.

Legson's teenage life was therefore greatly shaped by the new school, Livingstonia Secondary School which was a mission boarding secondary school. The school was located even further away from his home than his previous ones and presented many challenges to him personally and his poverty-stricken family. The challenges ranged from continued pressure on him to quit school, inferiority complex, shortage of clothes and pocket money. Legson held on to his education and passed his Cambridge-administered Secondary School Leaving Certificate examinations but the country had no tertiary institutions where students could go to further their education except Domasi Teachers' Training College. One thing that comes out clearly is that his secondary school education at Livingstonia changed Legson's perception of the world and his place in it enormously. It appears his earlier definition of himself as a colonial subject was no longer obtaining and he had to set his eyes on new collective ideals, definitions and aspirations of which his colonial Nyasa nation was not representative. So the young man decided to leave for the United States of America to further his education and gain personal liberty as a way of actualizing what he wanted to be in life. Without a passport, means of transport, pocket money and other resources required for such a long trip, he started off for the United States of America on foot in what became one of the

longest walks by an individual in recent history. His journey began on 14th October, 1958 eventually reaching Khartoum, Sudan covering a distance of about 2, 500 miles. To get to Sudan, Legson had to pass through parts of present-day Tanzania and Uganda in a journey that took several years. He rested in several villages and towns and found manual jobs in some to earn money with which to buy food, mostly bananas on the way. His aim was to work on a ship and find his way to the United States of America which he fondly referred to as the land of [Abraham] Lincoln.

His journey to Khartoum was not without challenges. He fell sick several times on the way, ran out of food several times, felt lonely, missed his family and suffered from fatigue. But he soldiered on until he finally got to Kampala, Uganda where he started visiting libraries such as the British Consul Library and the American library. Through his visitations to the American Library, Legson Kayira ended up applying for admission to Skagit Valley Junior College in Mt. Vernon, Washington in the USA. He was offered both a place of study and a scholarship. He applied for a passport while in Kampala and got it before proceeding to Khartoum in Sudan where he arrived on 25th September, 1960, two years after leaving his home village. After presenting his admission letters, the American consulate officials in Khartoum assisted him by communicating with the college where he had been admitted asking it to mobilize resources to cover his air fare to Washington. Legson arrived in Washington on 15th December 1960. While in Washington, Legson studied towards a diploma at Skagit Valley College and later completed his Bachelors Degree in History and Sociology at the University of Washington. During his stay in the USA Legson Kayira periodically received invitations from several groups and organizations to speak on a wide range of topics such as African culture, African history and traditional African religion. Upon completion of his studies in Washington, Legson Kayira returned to Malawi very briefly, a visit which coincided with the country's independence celebrations on 6th July 1964 but left

immediately after those celebrations for the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom to take up postgraduate studies in Political Science. After completing his Masters Degree at Cambridge, Legson settled in London and worked as a civil servant under the Department of Home Affairs. He got married twice, eventually retired and continued living in London until his death in October 2012 (Okeke, 2012). The story ends with his return to the West where he remained until his death in London in 2012. Physically, he never returned to Malawi neither did he visit the country again even after it became a multi-party democracy in 1994.

2.2 Kayira's Orphanhood, the Journey Motif and the Search for a Nation

In *I Will Try*, Legson Kayira's subject formation ties up with the formation of national consciousness within the context of a bildungsroman to such an extent that the two mirror one another. His growing-up and journey abroad document the development of a sense of identity in the world as a colonized, raced, and class-formed subject in a colonial nation and this gives the text its political dimension. As already pointed out elsewhere, in recognition of the fact that we are dealing with a bildungsroman that is at the same time an African autobiography, I find James Olney's (1973) ideas about the workings of an African autobiography quite instructive and single out two key points: Firstly the African autobiography is more nuanced towards the community rather than the individual. This being the case, much as the story of *I Will Try* is a personal one, it is equally a story intertwined with that of the community and the nation. Legson Kayira's personal story, therefore, reveals so much about the nation in addition to revealing certain facts about the writer himself. Secondly, any autobiography is selective and the selection of events, people or institutions communicates the perspectives held by the autobiographer. The story focuses on social-political change through which Legson Kayira's life is seen. In most similar nationalist autobiographies from the African continent, such as those by Joshua Nkomo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Camara Laye, for instance, the coming to maturity of the autobiographer

parallels the development of nationalism leading to the attainment of independence from colonial rule. Through the process of growing up, those autobiographers had discovered who they were as members of a particular society and their place in the world. In that regard, their sense of national consciousness was a rejection of the colonial nation-state. Legson Kayira was born and raised in a rural village with a conflicted sense of who he was and his place in the wider society. His father, being so poor, had no passport and was not known to exist by the government since the village-chief decided to shield him from paying the poll tax by falsely but purposefully declaring him dead. As a result, he was only known in the village, local area and to the ancestors. The life of Legson Kayira himself reveals that his journey from his early days of cattle herding to schooling and journey to the United States of America parallels the birth of Malawi as a nation from a primordial one to a modern entity and then to self-knowledge. In many respects, the pattern of Legson Kayira's growing up corresponds with the development of national consciousness of anti-colonial kind especially through the element of self-discovery which is found in Kayira's growing up as well as in the country's journey to independence. Interestingly, Kayira's growing up and the country's journey to independence have a shared fulcrum of national consciousness.

However, instead of the story ending with the attainment of independence or birth of the Malawi nation, it continues as Kayira searches for more western education and ideals by proceeding to England after witnessing Malawi's independence celebrations from which he never returned. This might be interpreted as signalling the fact that Malawi's nationhood will continue being outward-looking and unsettled. Using such a narrative structure of Kayira's autobiography and the fact that Malawi's independence parallels the American independence, Kayira might be suggesting that the Malawi nation-state cannot totally disentangle itself from western forms and ideals. This thinking is also supported by the fact that Kayira turned down offers to divert him to Eastern Europe on his journey to the United States of America. While

the text documents the people's yearning for independence by highlighting the struggles and aspirations of the natives and providing a different focus from Britain, its evocation of the American independence as an ideal form of nationalism shows Malawi's failure to distentangle itself from the western form of nationhood. "The land of [Abraham] Lincoln" which Kayira is so convinced would provide the best founding principles for the future Malawi nation shows that to him nation construction was part of the new international process of social organization and legitimation which the formerly colonized nations were encouraged to emulate. This is supported by Kayira's act of remembering news about Ghana's independence which erupted while he was still a student at Livingstonia Secondary School as it also shows that nation formation was part of the new international process of social organization and legitimation which Nyasas then were encouraged to emulate. As the students rejoiced, the teacher says:

> "Boys, show me where Ghana is on the map. We did not know where it was….We shouted in joy and assured ourselves that we too were on the road to independence" (p. 66).

With reference to the child motif where Kayira is essentially an orphan looking for a family I opine that the boy as a subject is lost and is going out there looking for an ideal nation such that the search for western education represents the search for an ideal nation/family as symbolized by his mother whom he has missed. The mother has in turn missed him too and could even recognize his foot prints as captured below:

> "I was walking on a dusty road just like the one at home. On both sides of the road were trees. They stood tall and thick as far as they went. I was walking on this dusty road, really, with most of my toes bleeding. I was hobbling. Once in a while I would look back at my footprints, and would grieve to myself that these footprints would

> soon be washed away by the waters of the rain, or they would soon be swept away by the bloom of the wind, and more grieving was the thought that my mother would never come here and see these footprints and say, 'I know who passed here'" (p.94).

The above excerpt indicates that colonialism opened the door to imagination of the ideal nation which Kayira was searching and this is symbolized by the longing which the mother usually has for her child who has gone missing. Although Kayira was a colonised subject, that colonization only made the people to imagine other forms of subjecthoods and never a total return to the African sense of nationhood characterised by nativism and essentialism. What is left is endless yearning for a total return to the source which the mother in the above excerpt symbolises but which is never realised. The autobiography, therefore, serves a political purpose of expressing the ambivalent state of the postcolonial African nation because Kayira's search and longing for the west contradicts his feelings towards the colonial nation from which he is fleeing and to which he has no natural connection. It also contradicts his feelings towards the pre-colonial African social reality which proved inadequate in addressing the people's aspirations and needs.

The journey motif is significant in Legson Kayira's politics of narrating the Malawi nation since in that epic journey to the United States of America, his return to Malawi after years in the wilderness coincides with the birth of the 'true' nation and this journey represents the manner in which the country's national consciousness developed from precolonial to colonial and then independence eras. This is so because the chronology in which Kayira's life and that of his community unfolds follows the same pattern as the development of nationalism in which in the beginning, the people whom Kayira is part of were living according to a culture and belief system handed down to them by their ancestors until the coming in of white colonialists which led to abandonment of their way of life. The development of nationalism follows Legson Kayira's psychological development in his process of growing up where, due

to colonial influence, he had to change his name as an adolescent from Didimu to Legson but later came to appreciate the significance of his original name more although the name "Legson" was stuck with him (p.39). This represents a kind of return to his original self which to be truthful never happened as Legson never got back to the traditional village life because his aspirations and world view had been transformed forever hence the use of his orphanhood in the narrative. Legson registers the following recollections:

> "I began to be more and more pleased if someone called me by my first [original] name. I began to look upon anything English with some reserve. Didimu is the name and the right name for me … (p.39)".

Similarly, the attainment of independence was, therefore, a kind of return to the 'real self' as a people but this return is portrayed as temporary and ambivalent as the people's collective perceptions and aspirations were now moving beyond pure nativism but in the direction of universality. Structurally, the chapter titled "A Salute to Malawi" which comes towards the end of the text shows that Kayira's journey was psychological in as much as it was physical with the birth of the new nation being the ultimate outcome of all the struggles his people had gone through. In that chapter, the text depicts Kayira eventually reaching his destination, the United States of America around the same time his country is witnessing the birth of the new nation, Malawi as an independent nation. One way of interpreting Kayira's use of that journey motif is to look at it as his way of imagining nation formation as a process whose desired outcome is the attainment of universal values of freedom, self-determination, human dignity and economic development which the American nation represents. The fact that Legson Kayira leaves for and settles in the United Kingdom soon after witnessing the country's independence celebrations would be construed as a sign that in his view, his country's nationhood is not a settled matter. This unsettled state of the country's nationhood which *I Will Try* depicts is supported by the fact that currently there is a movement pushing

for the secession of the Northern Province, the region from which Legson Kayira hailed to become an independent Nyika Nation (Chirwa 2014). This link between the journey and the development of national consciousness is further supported by use of the collective view rather than the individual view as Kayira talks about their lives as children and as a people to show that his story is not solely about him as an individual but the community he hails from and in which he grew up.

2.3 Shared Historical Memories: the Construction and Contestation of Malawi's Nationhood since Colonial Times

This section concentrates on historical memories and shows how these memories have been used to construct and dispute Malawi's claim to nationhood. The section tries to answer the following key question: What are the key historical events Kayira thinks are significant in constructing and contesting Malawi's nationhood? I will also speculate on Kayira's intention for evoking those particular events and deploying them as he has done. In short I will highlight Kayira's politics surrounding the manner in which he has used history.

Throughout the autobiography, Kayira has made reference to or deployed historical events with certain political and rhetorical aims. Use of history is a common phenomenon in politics of narrating the nation since a nation is constructed and understood in historical terms. However, the exact manner in which history is used is what separates one text from another, and by implication, one writer from another. Moslund (2003) notes that a writer can re-invent the past as a way of interrogating the people's claims to collective identity; sometimes the writer may dig out events that were hidden or silenced in an attempt to fill in the gaps in official records of history in order to create new interpretations of collective existence. **S**uffice to say that in narrating the nation, writers engage history extensively and do so with great flexibility in order to achieve their political and rhetorical objectives. For Hayden White (1987), literature is not so much interested in actual events as they happened on the time

continuum but in the representation of what had happened. It is in this spirit that other literary scholars like Michael Jackson (2002) talk about the rhetoric of fiction to refer to politics of representation of what happened. Accordingly, when using history in narrating the nation, writers use it in such a way as to achieve the political or rhetorical aim which is often an attempt to change the readers' perception of "the truth" or what is officially known about a particular nation. As Moslund (2003) further argues, the manner in which the writer deals with history in a particular narrative can be a metaphorical scheme for positing new knowledge or contesting existing knowledge about the nation and national identity.

In *I Will Try*, one central historical event to the process of Malawi nation formation alluded to is the setting up of the Livingstonia Mission by Dr Robert Laws in the Tumbuka-speaking area. This event is linked to the abolition of slave trade and the stoppage of wars and raids which tribes inflicted on each other prior to colonization (p.46). Through the narration of the history of the Livingstonia Mission as an institution, Kayira indirectly sketches how colonialism and the establishment of the Nyasaland Protectorate came about. He narrates that it was until 1859 that Dr David Livingstone, a Scottish explorer, while travelling on foot in the southern part of what is today called Malawi, saw Lake Nyasa and witnessed the devastating effects of the Arab slave trade. A little over a decade after Dr David Livingstone's visit, Kayira proceeds, Dr Robert Laws appeared in the area and established mission stations, schools and hospitals. Lawful trade was promoted to replace slave trade which was then outlawed locally through the creation of the Nyasaland Protectorate. Kayira portrays this event as significant to the construction of Malawi's nationhood by tying it to the activities of the colonial rulers who governed the territory such as Mr Petty who was in charge of all the schools in Kayira's home district, Karonga (p.46). This view is in line with what some scholars such as Mphande (1996) have stated by claiming that the early Christian

missionaries in effect invited or influenced the establishment of colonial rule which led to the construction of the Nyasaland Protectorate. In *I Will Try* Kayira writes,

> "After Dr Robert Laws' death, many years after his death, the school which he started in poor buildings, with only a few students during his time, was later upgraded by subsequent administrators who added new beautiful modern buildings which still retain much of their beauty and modernness today" (p.47-8).

Livingstonia is the school which Kayira went to many years later. Even at independence as presented in the chapter titled "A Salute to Malawi", Kayira's considers the birth of the new nation of Malawi as a direct outcome of those long trips, activities and sacrifices endured by the early Christian missionaries such as Dr David Livingstone, Dr Robert Laws, Edward Young and others over the previous one hundred years or so. He does so by portraying the attainment of independence championed by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda as the ultimate prize of Dr David Livingstone's coming to Africa and the experiences of the society on the time continuum as evidenced by his act of using the motto of his school (I Will Try) to be the title of his autobiography which essentially documents his society's journey to self-discovery of who they are as a collectivity. But as innocent as this historical fact may appear, Kayira's intention could be to assert Malawi as a Christian nation and even dispute her widely held ethnic image, that of being a successor to the ancient Maravi Kingdom. What is striking is the fact that all the historical events highlighted in this text such as the setting up of the Livingstonia Mission associated with colonization, abolition of slave trade, inter-tribal wars and group migration construct the Malawi nation as a group of people whose lives have been shaped by those events.

Kayira's selection of historical events that are significant to Malawi nation construction has, however, excluded the John Chilembwe uprising of 1915 which most Malawians believe is

central to the development of the country's national consciousness. Chilembwe's face has been inscribed on the country's currency, the Malawi Kwacha in recognition of the significant role he played in the development of national consciousness. Kayira has also excluded threats of annexation by Mozambique experienced especially by the southern parts of the Nyasaland territory. This selective memory by Kayira tells us something about his thinking of what he regards as the "real" Malawi. I turn to these two issues later.

In the meantime and by way of contestation, in the story of *I Will Try*, Legson Kayira decries the historical destruction of traditional culture by forces of colonialism as he considers nation-state formation as a process that robbed people of their self-determination and history. He depicts nation-state formation as a process that introduced terror and mistrust amongst the people and put in place a system that exploited and dehumanized the people in the territory. Such acts run counter to the true definition and character of what a nation is which is associated with nurturing, hence it is an act of rejecting the colonial nation-state formation. The construction of the nation-state of the British Central Africa Protectorate which later changed its name to Nyasaland is portrayed as a violent act of bringing tribes that were culturally different, previously rivals and which had committed atrocities against each other into the same fold. It is for this reason that in the chapter "A Salute to Malawi", he has expressed both doubts and hopes regarding chances of the newly formed nation to hold for long. The view expressed in the text is that Malawi can only continue holding together as a nation if it adopts universal values and sheds off its tribal based nationalism. This is contrary to the well-known political rhetoric by politicians including state presidents Kamuzu Banda and his successors that conceptualize the country's nationhood based on tribal and essentalist terms.

Even the well known discourse that Kamuzu Banda's political activities led to the construction of Malawi's nationhood, especially the one that describes Kamuzu Banda as the

father and founder of the Malawi nation, is contested in the text. Malawi's official history is silent on a number of past events that were instrumental in the construction of the nation in an attempt to create Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's preferred interpretations of collective existence. Kayira's narrative creates a different interpretation of the people's collective existence. I observe that Kayira's act of documenting the address by the nationalist, Kanyama Chiume, one of the leading members of the Nyasaland Legislative Council challenges the official narrative which portrays Kamuzu Banda as the man who led Malawians to independence, something which undermines any notion that there were other notable political leaders whose contributions to the struggle for independence need to be officially acknowledged. Mr Kanyama Chiume addressed the people and later called on Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda to come to the podium to speak during the rally held at Chinunkha (p.56). In Malawi, the contribution made by political figures such as Kanyama Chiume, Henry Chipembere, Harry Bwanausi and Yatuta Chisiza has been suppressed by Kamuzu Banda's narrative of the Malawi nation construction. However, Kayira brings Kanyama Chiume and Yatuta Chisiza's story to the fore (p.56-58) to show that these people on whom the official national history is silent are the ones who did a lot of work on the ground in terms of organizing the people while Kamuzu Banda only acted as a father figure.

As already indicated, John Chilembwe is a well-known national figure. His face appears on the national currency, the Malawi Kwacha and a national holiday is celebrated in his honour as a man who triggered national consciousness. Kayira however has ignored that piece of history probably considering Chilembwe's role as having a regional rather than national impact. Kayira may also have omitted that historical fact to show that he does not support Chilembwe's violent means of attaining self-rule in favour of the peaceful approach by Kamuzu Banda whose political activism he has highlighted. The other reason could be attributed to Kayira's own background as a northerner which may imply that the region

where one comes from relative to the dominant power may have an impact on how people use history in narrating the nation.

The other historical event which Kayira has alluded to in relation to the construction of the country's national consciousness is Malawians' direct participation in the two world wars. While under colonial rule, Nyasa people fought in faraway lands such as Burma under the Kings African Rifles (KAR) during the Second World War. Kayira's view is that this development helped construct national consciousness and identity since wherever these people went they were referred to as "Ma Nyasa" (the people from Nyasaland). The fact that these soldiers were drawn from different parts of the country also helped to instil national imagination beyond their tribal boundaries and fostered oneness through interactions with fellow soldiers outside of their tribes and mother tongues. Two of Kayira's men from his tribe who fought in the Second World War feature in the text. The first is a relative who returns from Burma (p.28); the second, a man who fights and then settles in Uganda (p.164).

The two individuals mentioned above reportedly fought under the Kings African Rifles which emerged victorious and so the victory instilled a sense of pride among Nyasaland's citizens. Both ex-soldiers were proud to be citizens of Nyasaland which at that time was part of a great empire, the British Empire. This pride is evidenced by the fact that these people talked very highly of being part of the British Empire and its achievements. They were happy to be associated with "clever Europeans who make aeroplanes" (p.27). Reportedly, the military contribution of Nyasaland during the Second World War was recognized throughout the British empire which further helped distinguish Nyasaland from other colonies and made the colony become well-known internationally (p.27). This last point reveals that the international community helped forge the Nyasaland national consciousness and identity. As some scholars such as Chatterjee (1993) have argued, a nation is sometimes named and popularized from outside rather than from inside. Although Kayira came from Mpale, he

reports that nobody on his journey across Tanganyika, Uganda and Sudan (which took place after the Second World War) would ever understand if he told them that he came from Mpale but they easily understood him whenever he said he came from Nyasaland (p.91). The point Kayira wants to make is that Nyasaland had entered the international register as a nation and certain elements had been ascribed to that nationhood unlike the specific area, Mpale or the ethnic group he hailed from. In other words, the international community had constructed and popularized Nyasaland so it carried particular meanings and characteristics that were bestowed upon it whether real or imagined.

As historians such as Pike (1965) have observed, the formation of the Nyasaland Protectorate was necessary to stop the Arab slave trade on the one hand and to protect and facilitate the work of the Christian missionaries who opened schools and hospitals in several parts of the territory on the other. At the same time, white estate farmers who wanted to grow sugar, tea and coffee also needed a functioning state structure which could only be guaranteed if Nyasaland was declared a protectorate. Since Kayira is narrating the nation, he presents both sides of the debate on the necessity of the creation of the settler nation-state for readers to judge for themselves hence provides it in form of an implicit question: Did the area require the nation-state as a new mode of social organization? He does this by highlighting the root cause of insecurity in the land while at the same time presenting the "glorious past" where tribes were self-reliant and they had existed for centuries in their unsophisticated state prior to colonization without requiring external protection until interference from outside came in. He also interrogates claims by colonisers that there was need to colonise African societies such as Nyasaland so as to protect them from attacks by directly posing this question:

> "The [white] man was using us and our land for his own advantage under the guise of protecting us. Protecting us against what? (p.19).

Besides, he does that by showing that most characters in the autobiography have a good sense of internationalism whereby foreign affairs greatly influence their lives since the aspirations, perceptions and collective consciousness of most of the people from his home area, with whom Kayira interacts, go beyond those of Nyasaland. In short his text seems to suggest that nationalism is partly about attainment of universal values and about being a member of the international community.

While celebrating the construction of the post-independent Malawi nation as a product of historical processes, Kayira's autobiography seems to posit Malawi as a nation of immigrants contrary to its image as a successor to the historical Maravi Kingdom. Not only did the people who had settled in his area migrate from elsewhere but also their sense of collective identity as MaNyasa (Malawians) was forged through travelling outside the country for various purposes (p.91). As far as Kayira is concerned, since the Malawi nation is constructed through historical migration, it is a nation of migrants and yet some tribes regard themselves as more Malawian than others especially when the nation is imagined as a successor to the ancient Chewa kingdom called Maravi. Lwanda (2000) has pointed out that migration has been a major component of the Malawian nation formation process. In the text, *I Will Try*, the idea that Malawi is a nation of migrant ethnic groups emerges through a series of migration incidents. By way of representation, Kayira has alluded to movements of groups from particular areas and settling in others as part of the process of nation formation. For instance, there is movement involving the entire family of one of his maternal grandfathers, Mr Tukwewe Kawonga, who re-joins his people in old age after moving away with all his belongings down to Deep Bay many decades earlier following a quarrel with his brother. Another instance of a migration narrative involves the biological parents of Kayira's mother who had recently settled in the village before his father married his mother (p.3). And yet another incident of group migration involves the cousin to Kayira's mother and her family

who moved into Kayira's village from another village about a hundred miles away. It is reported that their son, Maynard Sinkonde was as old as Legson and the two became great friends (p.30). Through these incidents, Kayira is painting a picture that group migration was common during the colonial and pre-colonial eras with the size of migrating groups diminishing over time to such an extent that today people usually migrate as individuals and nuclear families. It is through migration that the Tumbuka, Chewa and other tribes found themselves in the Malawian territory as separate societies and later on, one nation since historical sources such as those by Pike (1965) indicate that the original inhabitants of the area which is currently called Malawi were the 'pigmies' locally known as 'Akafula' who inhabited the territory around 1600AD and were eliminated by incoming tribes. Since the new tribes entered the territory at a later stage and at different times, Kayira has used group migration not only to question claims to collective historical existence but also to challenge the act of re-naming the country at independence as "Malawi" which he regards an exclusionary process that unnecessarily puts emphasis on Chewa cultural nationalism and mythology.

The re-naming of the country at independence as "Malawi" was reportedly made with an intention of correcting a historical mistake made by colonialists who had named the territory Nyasaland (Land of the Lake). There is usually the issue of what the people from outside call a particular group versus what the group calls itself. For instance, while the colonialists called the West African nation Gold Coast, the people of that territory preferred to call their nation Ghana. In the same vein, the people of Nyasaland preferred to name their nation "Malawi" literally translated as "Flames of Fire". In justifying the name "Malawi", Kamuzu Banda, the founding president, a historian himself and Chewa by tribe, once argued that most Malawians belong to one or another group of the Maravi people although they are not aware of it (Mphande, 1996). With reference to the ethno-symbolic approach to nationalism as

propounded by Anthony D. Smith (2009), one sees how this move by Kamuzu Banda created, for example, the dance masquerade (Nyau) of the Chewa or Maravi ethnic group as a symbol of Malawi's national identity. Kayira's narration of the nation shows that by naming the new nation "Malawi" Dr Kamuzu Banda's government, just like the colonial government that came before it, ended up making a big mistake for the name "Malawi" presupposes that the people occupying this land were historically Chewa, Nyanja or Mang'anja groups that constituted the Maravi Kingdom. As Vail and White (1989) also observe, the act of naming the country "Malawi" makes it a Chewa nation and this has created a perception that the Chewa or Maravi people are more Malawian than others such as Yao, Lomwe and Tumbuka. Matiki (2006) concurs with that assertion but adds that the act of making Chichewa a national language in Malawi has further promoted that perception. If nationhood is about the identity of the people in relation to the land the group has historically occupied and the history of its occupation, Kayira's political rhetoric of refuting the definition of the country unveiled at independence is clear. In short, Malawi faces a similar situation with Uganda in terms of nomenclature (Maravi to Malawi; Buganda to Uganda) and national symbols and ideals where in the latter case there is the centrality of the Buganda kingdom's ethno-cultural values to the formation of Ugandan nationalism, and ongoing overlaps and frictions between the Buganda kingdom and the Uganda state. While Uganda has roughly occupied the same territory and same people that used to be occupied by the ancient Buganda Kingdom, the scenario in Malawi is different thereby indicating how unnatural and artificial Malawi's nationhood is to the non-Chewas (non-Maravi groups). As far as Kayira is concerned the people making up the country are diverse rather than homogeneous. Legson Kayira delves into discourses of nation-formation and nationhood but with the view to show how flawed and violent the process was when he explicitly makes the birth of the new nation, Malawi one of the subjects of his autobiography, *I Will Try*.

Kayira writes:

> "The national anthem 'O God Bless our land of Malawi' was played. A new nation had been born and they called it Malawi. The new nation had been born, created and founded by one Dr H. Kamuzu Banda and freed, as it were from the same grand [British] empire" (p.249-50).

From his narration, it is clear that Kayira celebrates the attainment of freedom and independence by his people but the quotation suggests that he does not agree with the name given to the nation, and by implication, the affective meaning of this new nation. "They called it Malawi", he writes. Could it have been called something different? This act of dissociating himself from the name given to this new nation 'Malawi' when throughout the narration he has been part of the collective voice serves to counter-argue the perception that most of the people making up the Malawi nation are essentially Maravi. In the same spirit, Kayira echoes the doubts that most people had regarding the prospects of this nation holding together for long. As he rightly observes, sustaining this new nation would require hard work probably because he is aware that this nation has been created out of culturally and historically diverse groups which would soon start demanding their autonomy. The most well-known moves at breaking away from Malawi have been staged by the northern region-based tribes which have collectively been pushing for federalism or secession. Recently, there have also been calls by the Lomwe tribe wanting to break away from Malawi (Chikoko, 2014).

At independence, whose celebrations Kayira witnesses and his autobiography generously documents, the people, regardless of their tribal background, have rallied behind the vision of "Malawi" championed by the pro-independence leader, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda. African leaders who fought for their countries' independence such as Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda started interrogating the beginnings, their societies' histories and affective meanings of the

nation's identity and in some cases ended up changing the names of their countries from the ones provided by the colonialists to new ones (Soyinka, 1997). However, the act of re-naming the country as "Malawi" at independence and ascribing it with symbols such as fire, the dance masquerade (Nyau), dawn and the cock, all of which are associated with the Chewa creation myth, is essentially an act of asserting that Malawi is a "Chewa" nation. Kayira further contests that image using the plot structure of the narrative which resembles the development of nationalism where the attainment of independence follows a similar path to self-discovery after going through the colonial experience and then rejection of the newly discovered identity. As indicated earlier, Legson Kayira's act of going back to the West soon after witnessing Malawi's independence celebrations represents his rejection of the newly discovered Malawi identity and a search for a rational and more orderly entity, a society he could call 'home'. This is so because in contesting Malawi's nationhood, the text has constantly evoked a supranational consciousness as well as internationality. There is a certain level at which black people, regardless of the tribe they belonged to, knew that they were different from other races such as the white race and that they constituted a nation, the 'African nation' through shared historical experiences of slavery and colonialism. In support of this view, Vilakazi (2014) contends that the people of southern Africa, who currently live as separate nations, are historically and culturally one nation. In his submission, Vilakazi suggests that in spite of the separation, the two communities, namely one that has moved out of an historical territory and one that has remained behind are still one people and one nation. This argument by Vilakazi also justifies the fact that Legson Kayira is Malawian and his texts are part of the corpus of Malawian Literature although he had left the country and wrote in exile. In the case of Mr Tukwewe Kawonga whose story features in *I Will Try* and has been alluded to earlier, nation formation by way of reunion of historically related tribes may have been hinted. In general terms, the Malawi nation is largely regarded as the coming together of

some historically related tribes such as the Tumbuka and the Chewa (maravi) which were neighbouring tribes in the ancient Luba-Lunda kingdom, each of them being a collection of related clans which later grew into distinct groups speaking different dialects. As they settled in Malawi, these two tribes have unfortunately lost that historical relationship and have become major rivals. This development can be attributed to several factors including colonialism and competition for political power (Posner, 2004).

Even with the supranational consciousness at play in the text, it must be remembered that on the African continent, colonialism, capitalism, slave trade and racism have radically reshaped social relations and people's perceptions to such an extent that whom one saw as a family all along has eventually become an enemy and minor differences have been exaggerated to serve selfish capitalist ends (Vilakazi, 2014). Therefore, as Kayira's narration of events confirms, nation is in itself a process rather than an entity as social relations keep on changing people's perception of the 'self' and the 'other'. As several factors weigh in the process of nation formation, the final outcome cannot be easily predicted and is not realised. In Kayira's narration, what the people regard as their nation keeps on changing in response to emerging social phenomena and political dynamics such as the imposition of foreign rule, racial awareness and tribal re-awakening among others which are in essence manifestations of nationalism. These matters of fact only demonstrate the complexities that underlie the act of narrating the nation, let alone the Malawi nation.

In using shared historical memories, Legson Kayira also demonstrates that the formation and contestation of the Malawi nation could be understood through the historical experiences of the tribe, in this case, the Tumbuka tribe in which his personal life story unfolds. Essentially, the section deals with understanding national history through experiences of a tribe as it highlights the intrusions of the political onto the tribal sphere to reveal how the struggles of a tribe mirror and encapsulate national ones on the one hand and how some of them dispute

collective existence on the other. The key question which the section is trying to grapple with is: since historical events manifest in Kayira's life story, in what way does Kayira's use of local history constitute a politics and posit new knowledge or contest existing knowledge about the construction and sustenance of the Malawi nation? It is imperative to talk about "sustenance of the nation-state" because as Curtin (1966) argues, every tribe can potentially claim what he calls national self-determination by way of staging a competing nationalism. In his thinking, every tribe may revert to its original state and become a nation in the primordial sense. Curtin therefore calls the current collective modes of social organization in Africa as state-nations or potential nations rather than the popular term 'nation-state' since it is the colonial state which is attempting to create the nation instead of vice versa which he considers the norm. The question I have posed above is significant because, as Bhabha (2004) asserts, a nation is a space that is marked by cultural difference and heterogeneity of histories of contending groups. In that regard, the internal contradictions which characterize the Malawi nation such as the diverging histories between the Tumbuka tribe and the Malawi nation would mirror what Raymond Williams (1977) refers to as the residual meanings and practices of the modern nation. The section therefore digs out the stories of nationhood embedded in Kayira's experiences in his village as both discourse and counter-discourse since the tribe is believed to both mirror and contest the nation. As Renan in Bhabha (2004) asserts, deeds of violence like the ones witnessed by the Tumbuka tribe in the course of interaction with 'the other' are characteristic of the process of nation formation which relies upon forgetting of acts of violence. Nation as narration is therefore the representation of remembrance of those deeds of violence and traumas. Kayia's *I Will Try* acts out those traumas which are at the centre of nation construction in Malawi. What is more, he brings out views about the Malawi nation that arise from local experiences at the tribal area level. The text, *I Will Try,* shows how national consciousness and national history were formed and

inculcated within the framework of blackness and whiteness to achieve a national community that is more inclusive while at the same time contesting it. For instance while national consciousness in the text is constructed around the interactions between the natives and the colonisers, in some respects, the Tumbuka tribe's relationship with the nation is constructed around differences in historical experiences between itself and other tribes such as great deeds by Kayira's ancestors which the autobiographer passionately highlights; the escapades of the legendary thief who caused havoc in Kayira's area (p.89) and the tribe's historical links with a similar group in Tanganyika, now Tanzania all of which are either insignificant or utterly unknown to the other tribes constituting the Malawi nation.

Such oppositional relationships between the Tumbuka history and the Malawi nation are also reflected in differences in cultural rituals as enactments of history or collective memories seperating the two entities which Kayira has explored. One example of such events is the commemoratory event performed in honour of the founding fathers of Kayira's tribe who achieved great things for the survival and well-being of the group. Kayira documents that once in a while, since time immemorial, the people could come together for such ceremonies as well as asking those ancestors to give them rain whenever it did not come on time (p. 23). By foregrounding the pre-colonial events in his Tumbuka land, Kayira is questioning the birth of the Malawi nation as a natural culmination of the Tumbuka history. Such a view can easily find support from scholars like Jasper Dag Tjaden (2012) whose argument is that a nation as an entity is one that is perceived by its citizens as something natural, primordial, organic and historic in the sense that its symbolic value extends through time and its birth is a historical and inevitable truth realized through time. Considering that the scope of influence of ancestors does not often go beyond the clan or tribe, the Malawi nation does not look like a natural outcome of the Tumbuka history which in some respects stands in opposition to the history of the nation.

As Ernest Renan in his popular essay, "What is a nation?", reprinted in Bhabha (2004: 8-22) argues, a nation is a distortion, a myth or an error in past social experiences for processes leading to nation-formation do not follow clearly defined logic in most cases. Historical records by de Lacerda and Father Pinto, for example, show that the Tumbuka were a distinct tribe from the Maravi group (Pike 1965: 41). In this regard, Kayira looks at the present reality of the Tumbuka being part of Maravi as a historical error since this tribe settled in the area as a distinct group with its own kingdom and past heroic events that came to define whom these people were as a group considering that there are certain episodes which show that there is some local Tumbuka history which is not part of Malawi's history. In short, Kayira has demonstrated the uniqueness of Tumbuka history through the use of cross-generational stories that go down the Tumbuka history to highlight those historical events at the tribe level which the rest of Malawi does not have as a way of showing the extent to which the history of the Tumbuka fits into the whole construction of Malawi nation. Since both colonialism and nationalism suppress tribal or local histories, the text is seen to question and wrestle with official accounts regarding Malawi's nationhood, hence creates some counter-discourses which help uncover certain aspects of nation-formation which have been overlooked or silenced by the dominant narratives of the nation.

However, what stand out in the text are instances where the experiences of the Tumbuka tribe stand metonymically for those of the entire Malawi nation. Moslund (2003) has noted that in a scenario where the experiences of the tribe or its stories stand metonymically for those of the entire nation, the writer's political aims would be different from a scenario where such experiences or stories of a tribe have an oppositional relationship with those of the nation. Legson Kayira has placed the experiences of his Tumbuka tribe or local area at the centre of his writing and has reflected the relationship between tribe and nation both metonymically and in oppositional terms. While his Nigerian counterpart, Chinua Achebe has narrowed his

view of his Nigerian nation in *Anthills of the Savannah* (according to Aghogho, 2014) by limiting its scope to an ethnic group, local area or region, Kayira has done the opposite in *I Will Try*. On his part, Achebe has done that as a way of rejecting his Nigerian nation as an acceptable form of social organisation. But Kayira has largely used his local area (tribe) as a microcosm of the Nyasaland nation-state since the history and experiences of the local area largely has a metonymic relationship with that of the Nyasaland nation-state. In many respects, Kayira has metonymically portrayed the village sagas while representing the nation in such a way that the village has become a site where history of nation-formation is explored. Taking due cognizance of the fact that in an autobiography, history usually consists of the atrocious past events that had been experienced then remembered and alluded to by the auto-biographer, it is possible to view the tribe represented by the village as a site where the traumas of nation formation are explored. This is particularly so for a person like Legson Kayira who spent most of his early life in his local area at the most critical time of colonial domination. To begin with, Legson Kayira documents the visit into his area by the colonial administrator as a local historical event that enacts nation formation as follows:

> "Our chief had received word that a white government official would be visiting our area and other parts of the district, and he picked on several men from the village to carry his load. My father was among them. The journey was long and tedious and it took them a long time before they finally got to our village, as the white man and his carriers were going from village to village, spending a night in each. I had never seen a whiteman before, and when the day arrived when he was due in our village, hundreds of us stood beside the path, awaiting his arrival. I saw a line of tired men, my father included, all carrying on their shoulders on their heads chairs, tables, a tent, boxes and many other things. It appeared as though the white man was moving to some other place. Slowly they passed us with no words and no smiles on their faces.

> Besides these men was a suntanned white couple. The man was walking briskly, not seeming to care about his heavily burdened carriers. His wife was lying luxuriously on a stretcher held by four of the strongest men of the group" (p.18).

It is this kind of dehumanization of African people during colonial rule reported above that led the natives to start thinking of themselves as a collectivity and to seek independence or form a real nation (as opposed to an imposed settler nation which is often considered artificial). They started asking questions about their destiny and dignity as descendants of particular ancestors. Historically speaking and as Kayira's text puts it, in as far as Africa and Nyasaland were concerned, the natives were primarily victimised as highlighted above by taking away their land and forcing them to work for the colonialists on the estates, homes and as trasporters without pay in a labour system which was termed "Thangata" (Power 2010: 14), and they were dehumanized in several other ways which led to the growth of anticolonial nationalism culminating into independence (p.249).

In Kayira's narration of the colonial administrator's visit into his local area, he mentions the idea that the British colonized their area under the guise of civilizing and protecting the natives. But tribes and their chieftainships had existed for many centuries until terror was introduced during the era of the slave trade, the industrial revolution and scramble for Africa all of which had been orchestrated by external forces. Using Gayatri Spivak's concept of planetarity, people are encouraged to see local history in the context of the global rather than strictly local context. That implies that those events deemed as pivotal to the construction of Nyasaland as a nation-state are extensions of global events thereby dismissing them as national events. What Kayira's tribal people are experiencing is a representation of what was happening throughout the Nyasaland territory and beyond whereby the natives worked for white colonialists without pay in tea, coffee, cotton and tobacco plantations and were dehumanized in so many other ways. For example, they were beaten in the same manner

Legson Kayira's father and his fellow carriers were whipped 'on their bare buttocks' and denied food and rest (p.20). By making the experiences of the Tumbuka people in their local area stand metonymically for the entire nation of Malawi, Kayira aims at asserting the fact that the Tumbuka ethnic group is part of the Malawi nation whose people are united through the historical subjugation by the British, Arab slave traders and other foreign perpetrators of violence. Needless to say that the dehumanization of the Tumbuka people by the colonial official is representative of the suffering of all Malawians during the process of nation-formation that span several centuries.

The rejection of the colonial Nyasaland nation by natives is represented through the postcolonial concept of the "unhomely" that made Kayira flee his natural environment for far-away lands. The "unhomely" as conceptualized by Homi Bhabha is a condition whereby a character is made to feel uncomfortable with the environment created by colonialism. In Kayira's scenario, the nativist nation that was fought for during the struggle for independence only became a symbol for the glorious past that gave the natives like him an image of a desired mode of social organisation out of foreign control but he finds it too limiting and backward. So natives like him looked beyond a pure primordial and nativist form of nationhood and set their eyes on greater polity and freedom which signals internationality the image of which The United States of America provides. Kayira's journey is symbolic for it demonstrates that there is an invasion of his natural space leading to permanent alienation, psychic dislocation and estrangement. In Bhabha's context, the private space of the family becomes a site where the nation's history is inscribed. The home becomes "unhomely" in that "[t]he boundary between the home and the nation becomes confused" (Bhabha, 1997:141). Essentially, the "unhomely" quality exists when the political or the public intertwines with the domestic or the local as is the case between Kayira's tribe and the nation in *I Will Try* since the tribe is a unit of the nation but it also contests the nation.

In constructing the colonial Nyasa nationhood, the text, *I Will Try*, therefore undermines the assumption that experiences of a tribe are separate from the realm of national politics and official history. The tribe and the nation in this text are part of each other such that national history is felt in the experiences of the tribe but as indicated earlier on there are a few instances where its experiences are different from those of the nation. My analysis shows that Legson Kayira's upbringing in the colonial nation-state robbed him of his cultural heritage since there are some regrets of what had become of him and his people as transformations were taking place. For example, as the traditional African society moved from a state of self-sufficiency, peace and tranquillity, genuine honesty, selflessness and dignity to a state of insecurity, chasing of foreign dreams through formal education, commerce and modern forms of governance and knowledge associated with the modern nation became a common practice. Somehow, Legson Kayira seems to bemoan that transformation. Colonial powers are portrayed as responsible for the insecurity in the territory which was later used to justify colonization so that the colonizing nations could provide security and development which the colonized people desperately needed. Kayira registers the historical sense of insecurity at the local area level before the country was colonized and after. This sense of insecurity applied to all the tribes across the territory that led people to be alert and suspicious of strangers all the time. John Mc Cracken (1968) describes the area which is today called Malawi as a land of great chaos and insecurity from 1870 onwards resulting from the presence of too many clashing and competing foreign interests. Kayira alludes to the presence of guns and mentions what he considers as the main reason for colonizing Nyasaland, that is, exploitation of the country's valuable natural resources such as ivory and gold under the guise of protecting the natives (p.143). In further reference to insecurity, Kayira reports that as young boys, elders would often tell them that if strangers found them outside their village and asked them where they lived, they should point in the opposite direction probably to trick them in case they had

plans of attacking the village (p.143). The culture of insecurity continued up to the time Legson Kayira left for the United States of America on foot.

However, what is dominant in this text is his positive attitude towards the emerging social transformation and adoption of elements of modernity rather than bemoaning death of the cultural aspirations and ideals that defined him as a member of the Tumbuka tribe and colonial Nyasa nation from which he fled. Although the long journey on foot is a mockery to his tribal aspirations and heritage, Kayira justified this trip by insisting that it was aimed at acquiring knowledge that would make him acceptable to a modernity that would accord him greater freedom and make him a better person through the following lines:

> "I saw the land of Lincoln where one literally went to get the freedom and independence that one thought and knew was due to him. One day I would also go there, I would also go to school there and I would also return home to do my share in the fight against colonialism" (p.66).

The text therefore highlights the precariousness of the national consciousness forged through the colonial process which was riddled with contradictions and inadequacies. The American spirit of self-actualisation, liberty and independence, as Kayira sees it, stands in sharp contrast to that of his colonial nation he is fleeing from and it is the bedrock on which internationality rests. This implies that Kayira's view is that the best way of forging a true national consciousness is through the adoption of universal values associated with internationality.

2.4 A Nation as a Named Territory: Constructing and Questioning the Historical Boundaries of the Malawi Nation

In this section I explore how Kayira disputes Kamuzu Banda's claims to Malawi's geographic space as he travels through Tanganyika where he finds a lot of similarities in

culture, language, customs and food between his area and those in Tanganyika. A collectivity cannot be a nation unless its people inhabit a particular territory which they regard as God-given and name it in line with their local history and culture. According to Green (2010), a nation-state is defined by a specific territory, legal system and sufficient concentration of power to maintain law and order in that historical territory. As Green (2010) further observes, even when we consider a nation as a historical process, this process is inscribed physically on specific territory and orally through commemorative rituals, oral art forms, and collective legacies.

Legson Kayira grew up in colonial Nyasaland with assumed national boundaries and a legal framework to enforce law and order. Even going back in history, Kayira himself indicates that his community, like that of his ancestors, never went beyond Nyikamwaka and Bula mountains as his ancestors had settled in the valley between these two mountains and this constituted their world (p. 82-83). Natural features such as big rivers and mountains are sometimes used to form natural frontiers of nations as they greatly limit people's capability to interact beyond them. Such natural bariers and the absence of roads and other means of transport coupled with the existence of thick forests meant that each community virtually existed more or less like an independent entity under a local chief who usually had blood ties to a paramount chief. Kayira writes that when one talked about his people, he meant his blood relations. During pre-colonial times, the people's view of the nation was mostly primordial with the tribal chief acting as the centre of people's claims to common descent and social organization. Besides, life was very primitive as it was characterized by "cattle and goat grazing, and wild pig hunting" dictated by the physical environment.

On the other hand, the creation of the nation-state at the onset of European colonialism was top down. The British never used tribal boundaries but physical features such as rivers and mountains, a scenario which in some cases ended up splitting the people belonging to the

same ethnic groups. The text highlights the fact that the Tumbuka in Nyasaland and those in southern Tanganganyika are one people split by the colonial peocess.The assumption by the colonialists was that one nationality never extended beyond national borders like the one separating Malawi and Tanzania. The act of carving out a piece of land along a lake is reflected in the map of Malawi itself: a narrow strip of land along what Dr David Livingstone called Lake Nyasa. But one thing that has been overlooked in understanding the African people's interrelatedness is the interconnectivity that exist among neighbouring tribes through inter-tribal marriages, perceived historical blood ties and trade which the text, *I Will Try* exposes. This interrelatedness of people across physical features which the British used in creating the Nyasa nation manifests as Kayira passes through southern Tanganyika where he notices that culturally speaking, the tribes there were very similar to his Tumbuka tribe. For example, some of them spoke ChiTumbuka language just like his people. He also notices that men there paid heads of cattle to the brides' parents in order to marry the girls and that they inherited their fathers' property including spears, land and chieftainships just like those in his Tumbuka ethnic group did. By bringing to the fore this observation, Kayira is questioning the territorial boundaries of the Nyasaland nation as they have been constructed through the process of colonization. Even as he walks into Tanganyika, Kayira does not cross any international boundary between Nyasaland and Tanganyika as it was non-existent. Neither did he carry a passport as there was no physical border post to cross. In addition, he wonders why his Tumbuka, a patrilineal society, could have become part of Malawi (Maravi) which is matrilineal and does not practice a culture of paying heads of cattle as bride price. This is against the backdrop that the official discourse posits that the formation of the Malawi nation was the most logical development to have taken place considering the historical events in the area in the 16th and 17th century (Pike 1965) and taking into account the idea of forgetting the traumas of the past.

Some scholars have argued that African tribes were not united but lived as isolated entities prior to colonization. Duncan du Bois (2014), for instance, contends that just like in medieval Europe, most African communities existed as separate and independent chieftaincies. Although that might be the case, Kayira's journey on foot across Tanganyika, Uganda all the way to Sudan reveals that there are more similarities than differences amongst African communities which dispute Duncan de Bois' claims. In connection with the foregoing, we realise that the name of the main political party formed by local nationalists to help Nyasaland achieve independence was the Nyasaland African Congress and that when its leader, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda addressed the masses at Chinunkha, in closing the mass rally they all sang 'God Bless Africa'. By so doing, they were pronouncing an African-wide nationhood as existing in the imagination of the people at that time (p.59). Nationalism during the colonial era had taken the form of racial awareness among African people. It must be emphasized that during that time, Africa was thought of as one nation and one people so that when a guard at a railway station in Tanganyika tried to evict Legson Kayira who had been seeking refuge there at night by pretending to be a passenger in transit, Legson had to appeal to their supreme common identity, the African identity in order to persuade the guard not to evict him and he succeeded. This may seem to extend the limited boundaries of the nation in favour of a nationhood that applies to the entire African continent. Vilakazi (2014) in his article, 'Colonialism divided one Africa one people' observes that political parties south of the Sahara such as the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, Kenya African National Union (KANU), Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) and others were born as pan-Africanist movements with the view to from a single federation, the African federation or nation-state. He is quick however, to point out that the ultimate goal of one African nation is yet to be realized because most of these parties reformulated their agenda after attaining national independence as the new realities necessitated them to focus on their individual

countries instead of Africa as a whole. This kind of supranational consciousness, (a sense of being African rather than Nyasa) that manifested during Kayira's epic journey across Tanganyika seems to contest Malawi's nationhood.

The basis for a continental-wide approach to nationalism witnessed at the Chinunkha rally is the assumption that nation is race occupying a particular geographical area, in this case Africa, and nation as common historical experiences, in this case slavery and colonialism. The assumption of Kamuzu Banda's early political activities and those of his fellow nationalists across the African continent in the 1940s to 1960s was that all of them were later to join their political parties into a single African congress and a single nation. The attainment of independence in Ghana which is reported by Kayira (p.66) gave impetus to other colonies to seek independence. Nation re-construction like the one Ghanaians achieved at independence meant that such a setup had become a new and acceptable mode of social organization to be emulated.

However, the act of naming other nations bordering Nyasaland is an act of constructing the boundaries of the Nyasaland nation for it marks out the extent of the geographical space of the nation. Kayira has also marked the geographical space of the Nyasaland nation by highlighting cultural practices that are not allowed to take place beyond the boundaries of the nation. One such practice is marriage arrangements. Rituals such as that of giving the spirits of the ancestors periodic offerings, and marriage practices are some of the tools through which the borders of the Tumbuka tribe are maintained and by extention they are the tools through which the borders of the Malawi nation are maintained. Kayira reports that the girl, Emma Munthali, whom he admired so much while at Livingstonia Secondary School could not be allowed to marry Mr Chilufya from Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia because he was a foreigner from far-away land and also because he belonged to a different nation. Since the boundaries of a nation are cultural in as much as they are physical, the failure of Emma's

proposed marriage to Mr Chilufya reveals the boundaries of the Nyasaland nation but may serve as a contact zone with other nations.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how Legson Kayira has engaged some of the most significant elements of Malawi's nationhood namely: national consciousness, national history and geographic space (territory) during colonial rule using his autobiography titled *I Will Try*. In order to show that the country's nationhood is not a settled matter, Kayira has utilized a unique autobiographical structure in which the autobiographer's awareness of his place in the world coincides with the development of national consciousness reflected in the attainment of the country's independence from colonial rule. Since Kayira's search for western education continued after witnessing independence celebrations, this could be regarded as a sign that the Malawi preordained national consciousness is not the ultimate consciousness to some groups in the country. The chapter has also discussed how Kayira has used some historical events to highlight certain issues pertaining to Malawi's nationhood. In this regard, Kayira has singled out five major events that in his view led to the creation of Nyasaland namely: historical migrations into the territory which is currently called Malawi by certain tribes; establishment of Christian missions; involvement of local people in the two world wars; and Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's political activities. But Kayira has engaged those historical events to achieve his political intentions such as questioning claims to collective existence, questioning the 'Malawianness' of some ethnic groups making up the nation and even pointing out silenced history thereby constructing both the discourses and counter-discourses surrounding Malawi's nationhood and its national history. As far as Kayira is concerned, those historical events pointed out above were only extensions of events on the world stage such that to look at them as the major nation-constructing events would be to miss the point because whatever was happening in the territory was part of global history and need to be

interpreted within the context of the global realities. So Kayira is even contesting the locality of these events especially when they are presented as national events. There is a section on how Kayira has used the local area, in this case the area inhabited by his Tumbuka tribe in his politics of narrating the nation in which the historical experiences of the local area stand both metonymically as well as in opposition to the experiences of the nation. This too is a highly political act as it confirms the fact that the Tumbuka tribe is part of Malawi while in some respects it rejects claims to its assumed collective existence with the Malawi nation. Local history is also evoked to highlight the fact that the Nyasaland nation had been constructed through a process that dehumanized its people and robbed them of their cultural heritage. The chapter finishes off with how Kayira has constructed Malawi's geographic space by naming her neighbours and mapping out some of the key physical features and the territory that in people's consciousness inhabited their ancestors and which they have inherited. But Kayira also uses his journey through Southern Tanganyika and beyond to challenge the country's claims to a particular historical territory when he flees that territory without crossing any international frontier between Nyasaland and Tanganyika, and does not carry with him any identity document such as passport. Kayira's narration of events surrounding the construction of the Malawi nation shows that there is what can be termed as homogeneity and heterogeneity of history of the nation. Homogeneity has been used where experiences of the Tumbuka ethnic group stand on the same line with those of Malawi such as when the Tumbuka area has been associated with the coming in and the activities of Dr David Livingstone and the Christian missionaries which are touted as the real foundations of this central African nation. As most historians believe, the birth of the Malawi nation can never be conceived of outside Dr David Livingstone's historic visit to the region and the activities of the Christian missionaries who followed. However, there is also heterogeneity of history of the nation which is shown where the Tumbuka ethnic group is presented as having a separate

history and cultural orientation as a patrilineal society in a nation that is predominantly matrilineal. Homogeneity of history of the nation is mainly used to construct discourses that assert what officials such as Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda have posited about the Malawi nation, for example, by claiming that Malawians are one nation. Heterogeneity of history of the nation is used for purposes of contesting dominant discourses about the Malawi nation, for instance, by showing that the imposed settler nation formation cannot be justified as a natural social construct since the colonialists introduced terror in the area and later used that terror to justify the creation of the nation-state. For Kayira, the major method of registering his contestation of the Malawi nation is by questioning Malawi's claims to collective identity through his act of interrogating the authenticity of the name "Malawi" that was given to the nation at independence. Kayira's political intentions also come out in the implicit statements he has issued through the representation of his Tumbuka ethnic group and events in the making of Malawi, for instance, statements that show that the tribes in Southern Tanganyika were very similar to his Tumbuka ethnic group culturally speaking. Through such representations, Kayira considers the reality that his Tumbuka tribe is part of Malawi as a historical error. This is supported by his expression of doubt over prospects of continued existence of the newly born Malawi nation at independence whose celebrations he witnesses.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE: National Identity and Politics of Belonging to the Nation in *Jingala*

"The construction of any certain identity is an inclusive process with the internalization of the same values of the identifier, but it is also an exclusive process with the elimination of other identities"

(İnaç and Ünal, 2013)

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss how Kayira has represented national identity and a sense of belonging to the Malawi nation as key aspects of nationhood. In an ideal nation, the people's collective identity as reflected in common values, beliefs and aspirations forms the basis of the manner in which a society is organized and what its national character is. Yet, a sense of belonging to the nation may be used as much for asserting and challenging national identity. The chapter, therefore, tries to show how the novel, *Jingala* demonstrates that the main characters' values, beliefs and aspirations are at odds with the nation-state's ideals and governance structures, and examines the sense of belonging to the nation amongst major characters. It explores subversive acts used by Kayira either directly or symbolically as tools for critiquing national identity and a sense of belonging to the nation within the context of western modernity through which Nyasaland (Malawi) as a postcolonial nation-state is constructed and contested.

The novel *Jingala* was first published in 1969 and depicts Malawi still under colonial rule. The protagonist, Jingala Sukuma is a former government tax collector and widower following the untimely death of his wife, Lute Namonje. Since his wife died some nine years ago, Jingala has never remarried but has been promised a replacement for his deceased wife by his

brother-in-laws. However, he is to wait until Liz, who is seven years old, comes of age before she can become his wife. This arrangement is in line with the custom which dictates that failure to offer a replacement to a man who has been so nice to his in-laws would be frowned upon in the society. In fact, the consequence is that the in-laws would be required to pay back part of the eleven heads of cattle which Jingala had paid as bride price for his initial wife. For the reason that Jingala treated his wife well and often assists his in-laws in time of need, he is regarded very highly by his brother-in-laws, Duka and Kayiteke who often describe him as an honest, industrious and generous man.

Jingala has only one child named Gregory whom he has raised almost singlehandedly and has painstakingly sent to St. Bonface Boarding School despite his difficult financial situation since retiring as a local government tax collector. All of the other six of Jingala's children died before they were born hence Jingala has generally been a sad man in his adult life and is pitied by many. Currently, he has placed all his hopes on his only surviving child for continuity of his legacy and maintenance of his place in society.

St Bonface Boarding School, the school Gregory attends is run by Roman Catholic priests. What has surprised the people in the village including Jingala is that it is now two years since Gregory last spent his holidays in the village. Jingala, therefore, decides to travel to the school to see him and find out where he has been spending his holidays. Upon arriving at the school, Jingala learns that his son is not only the Assistant Chief Prefect but he is also training to become a Roman Catholic priest. Gregory himself does not seem pleased to see his father at the school and the two have a big argument regarding Jingala's unannounced visit. The son tells the father that although the school is closing in few days to come, he has no plans of going to the village. When the father presses him to tell him where he intends to spend his holiday, Gregory discloses that he intends to spend it at Father Robertson's house for Latin lessons as part of his training towards celibate priesthood which he does over the

holidays. Jingala is very cross upon hearing this and decides to confront the school's Principal immediately. This confrontation culminates in Jingala's immediate withdrawal of his son from the school. Jingala vows that his son would never return to that school. Gregory protests his father's actions but to no avail. Father Edwards, the Principal says that Jingala is destroying his son's future and happiness. In reply, Jingala's lamentation is that the white man's education is alienating his son from his people.

Back in Chimaliro Village, there are efforts to re-orient Gregory who is now almost eighteen years of age into village life, the history of his ethnic group and meaning of existence. Jingala himself as well as the village-chief take it upon themselves to teach Gregory their ethnic origins, values, the people's expectations of him and the meaning of life in the African context. They press on him to build his own house, look after his aging father, open a garden and get married. Jingala, who holds an influential position in the chief's council in his village, urges his son to take this opportunity to assert his position in the society but it seems his words are falling on deaf ears.

As the story progresses, Liz is about to become of age and Jingala, in conjunction with the village chief and Kayiteke, have arranged a girl for Gregory to marry. The girl's name is Belita, Dereva's daughter, and Dereva is Jingala's old friend and fellow retired local government tax collector. When this information is brought before Gregory, he protests the arrangement claiming that he was never consulted on the matter and that he does not like the girl. However, as per the tradition, Belita prepares meals and from time to time cleans Jingala's house which is being occupied by both Jingala and his son, Gregory. Liz does the same for Jingala on the insistence of her parents. According to Nalombe, the village traditional midwife, Liz will soon come of age and will have to be presented to her husband, Jingala as soon as she is 'clean'.

Since Gregory returned to the village, he has been at loggerhead with his father who now sees him as a lazy, argumentative and disrespectful son. His frequent disagreements with his father are partly due to the fact that he is still harbouring thoughts of returning to St Bonface Boarding School to continue his training towards priesthood. Drama starts unfolding when a young man nicknamed Muchona returns from the mines in South Africa and his eyes fall for Liz. As the girl later realizes through the mockery she receives from her friends that Jingala is too old a man to marry, her attachment to Muchona increases. The two meet secretly by the well where Muchona promises to elope with her and take her with him to South Africa to "rescue her from Jingala and free her from the yoke of women slavery" as he puts it. In short, he promises her a good life, the life of a 'dona' or white lady away from the oppressive dictates of traditional Malawian culture. At first Liz is reluctant but she later buys into the idea.

As rightly predicted by the old lady Nalombe, Liz soon reaches puberty and according to tradition, she must be handed over to Jingala who has been waiting for this moment for the past eight years. As soon as Liz is 'clean' she will be handed over to her man in a traditional wedding ceremony to be presided over by the village-chief. Jingala is so excited that he orders that two of his cattle be slaughtered for the occasion, one being his fattest bull which he has reportedly been keeping for this occasion. He busies himself fixing and cleaning his house in preparation for the ceremony which is now within days, a sign that his expectation and enthusiasm are very high.

In the meantime, Gregory has received a letter and some money from Father Edwards. In the letter, the Principal urges Gregory to return to the school and promises that he and his colleagues will be responsible for his school fees. Gregory conceals this news from everybody in the village and decides to flee the village two days before his father's wedding. His fleeing coincides with Muchona and Liz's elopement which shatter Jingala unbearably

for at this point, the two cattle have been slaughtered and all the wedding preparations are completed. Jingala cries uncontrollably day in day out until he dies of grief. As the story ends, Gregory comes back to the village for condolences upon learning of his father's demise but he is shamelessly chased away by his uncles who insist that he does not belong to the village anymore and that he should therefore go back to the Europeans and the priests for that is where he belongs.

3.2. The Sort of National Identity Kayira has Prescribed for Colonial Nyasaland and the Discourses Used to Construct and Contest it

Novels are particularly viable texts in portraying how the people define their collective identities at any given time. As far as identity in Africa is concerned, the people in the postcolonial era have not only split but also multiple identities due to various and sometimes competing forces which act on them both as individuals and collectivities. In this regard, it is not surprising to observe that Kayira has constructed a hybrid collective identity that also includes the element of transnationality. At the same time, there are burning issues which Kayira is raising (the problematics of the nation) through the construction and contestation of the Nyasa national identity. Usually the manner in which a novelist constructs and handles the issue of national identity could constitute a politics, for in their novels writers implicitly issue statements, ask questions or contest what is widely known about the identity of the people constituting a particular nation. As Gagiano (2004) points out, novels are politically significant since in expressing particular identities, "[n]arratives may get caught up either in group pressure to serve separatist impulses or in nationalist pressure to legitimise a homogenizing state agenda" (p.815**)**. Similarly Bhabha (1990) considers literature as a site for narrating the nation as it is tied up with imagining the nation through the expression of nationalist ideology, engagement of the history of the nation and assertion of a people's culture. In exploring the issue of national identity, I am guided by what the people regard

their collective identity to be, and how this image is constructed, sustained and challenged. As such, I have looked at the ways in which characters both imagine and question the assumed identity and their belonging to the colonial Nyasa nation in relation to what I see as the state's homogenising agenda and Kayira's oppositional impulses. Further to that, I have looked at specific social practices and cultural symbols of collective identity that map out the imaginary field of the Nyasa national identity. I find Gagiano's view particularly instructive when she states thus: "[n]ationalism is no spent force but vividly and often violently alive in people's minds and conduct… as members in both developed and developing societies seek their own national definitions" (Gagiano 2004: 811). In this context I ask, "How does the narrative in *Jingala* construct and contest the single national identity of Nyasas?" Answering this question has revealed what Kayira regards the Nyasa national identity to be. Yuval-Davis et al (2006) recognize identities as narratives which people tell themselves and others about who they are, and by implication, who they are not and that such narratives could be reproduced from generation to generation albeit often selectively. In most cases, a nation is considered as a continuous process whose identity is registered on its people, infrastructure and in residual cultural practices.

Throughout the African continent and even beyond, religion plays an important role in mediating imaginings of sameness and facilitates social organization in heterogeneous contexts. In as much as Nyasaland has been constructed as a Christian nation in this novel, ambivalence is also very conspicuous as cultures compete for dominance and power to define the nation. The country, Malawi very often describes herself as a Christian nation although it has a sizeable Muslim community as well as followers of traditional African religions. Just like the campaign to end slavery, the need to introduce Christianity to otherwise pagan and primitive people was another big motivation among colonialists in setting up the British Central African Protectorate which later became Nyasaland and then Malawi. Before the

colonial experience, the local people were basically followers of the cult of ancestral spirits worship which some people still subscribe to until todate. Some mix Christianity and traditional African religions. Most scholars have observed that Christianity as an ideology plays an important role in nation construction in postcolonial Africa for it symbolically and physically defines the boundaries of the nation (Babker, 2016: 102). This is so because in the context of diverse tribal cultures, Christianity provides a platform for imagining sameness as a people. As for Kleinen (1999), religion such as Christianity legitimatizes the nation-state by making it acceptable as a mode of social organization and control through its emphasis on similar values and ideals as those of the nation-state such as tolerance, hard working spirit and good citizenship. Specifically, Kleinen (1999) argues that Christianity is particularly a key component in modern nation construction because it advocates the same desired elements in human beings as the modern nation-state such as obeying the laws of the land as well as performing other acts of good citizenship in an act of what anthropologists generally call "invention of tradition". This invention of tradition shows a lot of collusion between Christianity and the nation-state in the then Nyasaland as depicted in *Jingala*. In that nation, Christianity was introduced before the territory was declared a British protectorate such that the construction of the Nyasaland nation-state was a product of the activities of Christian missions. Education in *Jingala* is in the hands of Christian missionaries and for children to be enrolled in schools they are supposed to become Christians as a precondition. When Jingala brings Gregory to school, for example, the two sides, the school and the parent had to strike a deal that saw the boy becoming a Christian before the school could enroll him. This implies that the country's future is charted as a Christian nation since children later grow into adults and continue orienting their own children into Christianity as the old folks fade out through old age and eventual death. No wonder the main action of the story is a tragedy that borders on the question of the country's national identity which is represented by the conflict

between Jingala and Gregory and is registered either on the main characters' experiences or their bodies. The conflict between these two characters therefore represents the fight over the issue of the country's identity as the Nyasa nation was facing the future. While in some former colonies, the nation and the church sometimes differed sharply and sided with the indigenous people in opposing each other, for colonial Nyasaland the picture so created in *Jingala* is that the state colluded with the church both to conscript Malawians and acculturate them in ways acceptable to the nation-state. Hence the country has put on the image of a Christian nation since the church and the state are presented as forces that imagine a similar kind of community if the exchange between Jingala and the headteacher alluded to earlier is anything to go by.

In terms of experiences, the novel seems to highlight the fact that although the country is branded a Christian nation, a big section of its population is still adhering to traditional African religions hence the abivalent character of the nation. Specifically, the belief in the power of the spirits of the ancestors is very rife amongst characters as it is among the people of Malawi. It appears exposure to western ideology and customs has failed to completely erode people's adherence to traditional African religions. So although the nation has put on the Christian identity, this identity is never portrayed as a lived experience amongst most characters whose lives are greatly influenced by traditional customs and beliefs. The two main characters namely Jingala and Gregory on whom the generational conflict of the text and the construction of the nation's identity are registered have both been visited by the spirits of ancestors at one point or the other through dreams. The spirits of the ancestors play a big role in the lives of both characters' lives. However, adherence to traditional culture including belief in the power of ancestral spirits appears to be diminishing mainly among the inheritors of the society such as Gregory. For instance, in spite of the ancestors showing Gregory where he actually belongs through the benevolent acts of the soro bird, he follows

his own mind by abandoning his village and parent and joining the priests (p.124). Considering this decline in the influence of the role of spirits in people's lives coupled with the symbolic death of Jingala, the main embodiment of traditional Malawian culture, Kayira might be asserting that the nation's identity is going in a direction away from essential Africanness.

The fact that Gregory has been visited by the spirits of the ancestors is important because it is a sign that the spirits recognize him. Since Gregory has embraced a modern identity associated with the colonial Nyasa nationhood that has embraced western education and values, this underscores the fact that Legson Kayira has used this reality to construct a hybrid national identity through Gregory as the Nyasa nation moves into the future.

Jingala is the oldest surviving man in the village and is naturally considered a valuable mirror of who his people are as a collectivity. However, key markers of national identity do not seem to have been inscribed on him as much as the tribal markers have. One such national marker that does not seem to have been inscribed on him is the national dress code. An act of subversion manifests when Jingala refuses to dress according to the prescriptions of the colonial nation-state. He often goes about wearing a loin cloth and carries an axe on his shoulder even on official trips. He sometimes wears a jacket and a pair of trousers but with no shoes. This may be an indication that Kayira does not think Jingala and his fellow native Nyasa people need to identify themselves with the colonial Nyasa nation with its established dress code for men being a pair of trousers, a shirt, waistcoat, jacket and a closed leather pair of shoes. Jingala is depicted wearing a loincloth both at home and even when travelling to his son's school in spite of having previously worked as a civil servant where matters of formal dress in public spaces were emphasized (p.3). So here is a character that instead of being a representative of the colonial Nyasa nation which he had proudly served on matters of dressing, he has rejected that identity preferring a pre-colonial and therefore pre-national

identity when Malawians were wearing loincloths that were locally called “nyanda”. He also periodically buys Liz “Chilundu” another pre-colonial kind of material women used to cover themselves with instead of the widely accepted commodity for women in colonial Nyasaland, the dress. As Jingala visits his son’s school, the son wonders why his father has come wearing a loincloth and a waistcoat, and is charging into the school yard with axes when he could quite easily afford to buy trousers and jackets *(*p.18). Through Jingala’s acts of wearing loincloths, the author is challenging the authenticity of the imposed Nyasa national identity which the colonialists had created for the people found in the territory they occupied. This subversion is further reflected in the political act of the village chief, that of coming up with his own flag for his tribe that is different from that of the nation-state (The Union Jack). The narrator reports that the village chief had a habit of flying his own version of a national flag outside his house which constituted of a cloth of whatever colour the chief finds convenient on each day such that the flag was different from that of the nation and changed from one day to the next (p.89). By so doing the chief is asserting that his tribe and its people do not belong to the colonial Nyasa nation. Since the chief’s act ensures that on each day a different flag is flown, a rigid national identity is thereby rejected in favour of an open identity that changes in line with the changing times. Liz’s elopement with the migrant labourer and their act of escaping into foreign lands on its part highlights a rejection to both colonial and post-colonial nation in favour of internationality where colonial modernity offers mobility to women and the youth much to the displeasure of patriarchs and the church.

The contradiction in perception of what really constituted the colonial Nyasa national identity is observed even in the plot of the story itself which is characterised by one storyline trying to conquer the other throughout the story. For instance, the story of Gregory’s rejection of his people and their traditional values which represents a rejection of a fixed primordial identity is seen to be competing with and trying to undermine the one focusing on Jingala’s legacy as

a former tax collector and chairperson of the chief's council which is basically tribal, or that of Jingala's impending marriage which is inward looking. But Kayira has shown that in Jingala's village there are other young people like Gregory's cousins who are more on the side of Jingala than on Gregory's. These youths have only remained traditional due to lack of exposure to western education and values. I have also noted that at the level of tribe there is initiation of young people into future roles which the chief conducts yearly although forces of modernity easily sweeps them away as is the case with Muchona and his friends. This back and forth movement in the process of constructing a stable Nyasa national identity confirms the fact that although colonialism created modern nation-states that were meant to ultimately diminish traditional tribal leanings, this goal is too slow to achieve since the process goes in the opposite direction at the same time to such an extent that it may end up being unattainable. That being the case, national identity will always be hybrid and in transition as no complete diminishing of the residual identities will take place. As Abdelkader Babker (2016) observes, in Africa, primordial and new national identities will continue existing side by side for a long period to come.

The scenarios described in the preceding section show that Kayira's *Jingala* is not only the source of national narratives but also of tribal and transnational narratives as well. Tribal narratives, for example, are powerful vehicles for negotiating national identities in an increasingly complex world. Tribal narratives are expressed through the perceptions and experiences of the character, *Jingala* who has refused to take on a national identity constructed for him by colonialism while going about with objects that are markers of western hegemony such as dead watches and a bunch of keys which represents a national identity in a state of confusion. At the same time the text constructs some discourses and counter-discourses surrounding the Nyasa national identity. Firstly, there is a narrative which depicts colonial Nyasaland as a Christian nation as earlier pointed out. One of the markers of

Nyasa national identity according to the text is adherence to foreign religion particularly Christianity which is supported by a national education curriculum. In that respect, the novel, *Jingala* depicts a nation in which its people are largely Christians although they also believe in the power of their ancestors. This is witnessed when Gregory and his fellow learners at St Bonface Boarding School are oriented in Christian ways although they have not totally abandoned their traditional beliefs and customs.

The second discourse surrounding Nyasa national identity which the novel, *Jingala* seems to construct is that which purports to depict Nyasaland as a multi-racial and multi-ethnic nation. A story is told in *Jingala* about a young boy who had been taken into slavery by Arab slave traders but later escaped to Chimaliro Village. Although the boy did not speak the language spoken in Chimaliro area, the village welcomed him with open arms and raised him (p.56). The boy belonged to a different tribe since language often serves as a marker of tribal identity in most African countries. Similarly, some of the students at St Bonface Boarding School are reportedly from distant places and belong to different tribes from Gregory's. At the same time, Jingala creates an impression that the ideology of the headmaster, Father Edwards who is white and all his fellow colonialists is competing for dominance with African cultural ideology through depiction of the disagreements in perspectives between him and Jingala. What is more, Kayira has constructed a society in which the discourses of national identity highlighted in the above section are actualized into real identities on the ground to underscore the fact that there are disparate identities within the Nyasa nation, a scenario that rules out a single homogeneous national identity. Essentially, what Kayira has done is to concretize such national imaginings by showing different identities as existing within the borders of the Nyasa nation-state. Jingala still has tribal marks on his cheeks and wears trousers and waistcoats (p.1). Besides, he is resident in his wife's village even after losing his wife Lute Namonje through death some eight years ago. Through that combination of realities

surrounding Jingala, Kayira has constructed a hybrid national identity since Jingala's act of living in his wife's village reflects a Maravi/Chewa custom yet his act of paying heads of cattle to marry his wife reflects a Tumbuka marriage custom.

But the above narratives are contested by yet another narrative which edges the Nyasa identity towards transnationality, in particular the narrative of what would be called the South-Africanization of the Nyasa national identity whereby Nyasaland appears as a subsidiary of South Africa and a member of the international community in which characters like Muchona aspire to live. According to Msiska (2017), Malawi's international identity comes about as a result of its links to South Africa as a regional centre of a larger global system of capitalism and modernity. Msiska reiterates that there is deterritorialisation of national formation in Legson Kayira's *Jingala* that serves to represent Malawi as part of South Africa and that this kind of representation is in line with Benedict Anderson's thinking in which regions may be imagined communities to which individuals see themselves as belonging. The move towards a transnational identity is represented through the generational conflict over who these people are as a collectivity in which the youth not only reject the collective identity of their forefathers but also triumph in their attempts at constructing a new identity that cuts across race, nation and tribe. Such a transnational identity is associated with a global economy, freedom and democracy. In the novel, a new reality has emerged where essentialism is being challenged due to the proliferation of international exchanges of goods, cultures and ideas represented by the effects of migrant labour on Malawians' consciousness that keep on transforming their perceptions, outlook on life, nation and tribe. The first example of this shift is observed in Gregory who abandons the traditional religion that represents a localized and narrow approach to spirituality in favour of a broader if not global, modern approach to spirituality in the name of Roman Catholicism. Gregory wants to become

a Roman Catholic priest so that he can preach anywhere in the world and not just in his home area of Chimaliro (*p.*62).

Another example of this shift in national identity towards a transnational identity is depicted through the actions and perceptions of the other youths who no longer regard themselves as 'MaNyasa' as they associate Nyasaland with economic and cultural backwardness. The character Muchona and Liz, for example, have vowed that they are leaving Nyasaland for good. What is at the centre of this new identity is consumerism and cosmopolitanism which the character Muchona simply summarizes as "a culture of shopping, riding bicycles and other means of modern transport, eating foreign foods and having running water in the home" (p.106-7, 144). This new identity is of a unique kind where people think of themselves as members of the international community and are motivated by a search for glory and personal happiness away from their immediate societies. Further to that, the new identity manifests when Muchona elopes with Liz disregarding the disappointment which the elopement would cause to the chief personally, the entire village and Jingala in particular who has waited for eight years for the young Liz to grow into a woman**.** The novel, *Jingala* paints a picture that Muchona and his fellow miners represent large numbers of 'MaNyasa' who have ended up being culturally transformed in the course of working in South Africa and have developed some psychological attachment to that country. This underscores the fact that national identity just like individual identity is, by its very nature, multiple and not fixed; It is always in a state of transition (Kalua, 2014) and as Yuval-Davis et al put it, "[p]roduces itself through the combined process of being and becoming, belonging and wanting to belong" (Yuval-Davis et al 2006: 202). As Bhabha (2003) observes, there is always a liminal space internal to the nation, as a zone of engagement for the competition between existing and emerging identities. This liminal space is often the middle ground and provides room for imagining new identities as individuals or groups; It is a third space from which new

identities can be launched bearing in mind the fact that a nation is not an entity but a process "since it is neither made out of inanimate material nor designed by engineers" (Louissi and Grosby, 2007:2). The text builds a narrative that some Nyasas are residents of more than one nation-state as migration across its borders has been central to the country's history and construction of national consciousness. In line with Yuval-Davis et al (2006) observation which states that identifying oneself with a particular collectivity does not always require common descent, I observe that the character Muchona and his friends who work in the mines in South Africa have simply acquired the South African identity by subscribing to that country's culture. In the process they have influenced their families, relatives and friends back home to the extent that characters like Liz are easily taken up. Kayira writes:

> "It was customary for young men to leave the village and go to work in mines or on farms in South Africa. Large numbers of them joined others of their countrymen and went to South Africa each year…. After a year or two they came back to the village speaking a strange and incomprehensible language, and wearing overalls, steel helmets, heavy black boots with studs, sun glasses, and large rings on their fingers… They brought back money and clothes which they shared with their families and relatives. They also brought home sports bicycles and gramophones" (p.61).

Notwithstanding the historical mass movement of Nguni-speaking people from Zululand who later settled across the three regions of Nyasaland and have continued to carry traces of their South African identity, the opening of mines in South Africa followed by big businesses and international media there, have for a long time led to continued migration and exchange of ideas and cultures which has in turn facilitated the proliferation of South African culture in Nyasaland. The strength of the South African economy since colonial times has put Nyasaland on the receiving end as it has attracted many Nyasas to work there and by so doing enabled the importation of South African culture into Nyasaland. The above observation,

therefore, underscores the fact that the impact this two-way migration has had on people's social, cultural and economic lives in Nyasaland has been huge which in turn has affected Nyasaland's national identity to resemble the South African identity somewhat and as part of a global cultural identity.

In brief, all the four narratives of the Nyasa national identity in *Jingala* confirm what Homi Bhabha (1990) and Stuart Hall (1993) describe as "the ambivalence of the nation" as a common characteristic of national identity whereby cultures compete for dominance in the ongoing struggle to define the nation. Although this is the case, each nation, whether modern or primordial has its own means of defining collective identity and how people identify with that collectivity on the time continuum hence most writers use a generational conflict to explore the changing tastes and perception about a people's collective identity as Legson Kayira has done.

3.2.1 Kayira's Portrayal of Membership to the Postcolonial Nyasa Nation Using Politics of Belonging and the Death Symbol

The main strategy the author has used for constructing and contesting the Nyasa identity is through the process of nationalistic 'othering' which is an act of defining who is in and who is out of the Nyasa/Malawi nation imagination. Such a process is about constructing the 'other' to the existing nation imagination and, in this case it is about how the novel, *Jingala* has constructed people who do not share the common Nyasa identity and the people's sense of belonging to that nation. In this case I explore how the novel constructs non-belonging to the Nyasa nation. The question which I am grappling with is: how does Kayira's narration of the nation in *Jingala* represent that process of "othering"? To answer this question, I observe that lack of connection between the land and some of the characters is the main strategy used in nationalistic othering in this text in which an ideal Malawian is viewed as someone who has a natural connection with the land and subscribes to its traditional values, ideals and

beliefs. In this regard, the Roman Catholic priets who are white are perceived as aliens to the land as they lack both natural connection with it and knowledge of the meaning of existence in that land. This lack of connection and knowledge manifests in the hot exchange between Jingala and Father Edwards, the principal of St Bonface Boarding School who happens to be white (p.34). In that exchange, it becomes apparent that Jingala regards Father Edwards as an alien and someone who is ignorant of what being a 'MuNyasa' means. On his part, Father Edwards too feels Jingala is out of place since the modern nation constructed through the colonial process requires people to be formally educated and to subscribe to the modern values including freedom of choice. Gregory as an individual embraces both worlds and is an imbodiment of the modern Nyasa national identy. His act of abandoning his village and joining the White Fathers at the end of the story is hereby opined as opening the door for imagining a national identity that is beyond race, ethnicity and national boundaries since the White Fathers are international and outward looking in their world view and aspirations. Greogory, therefore, represents the kind of people who define the identity of the African nation born out of the colonial experience as non-essentialist, multi-racial, multi-ethnic and outward-looking. The death of Jingala at the end of the story, on the other hand, is also considered highly symbolic. The fact that the story of Jingala is a tragedy fits Kayira's scheme of constructing and contesting the country's identity for the symbolic death sheds off the country's old identity associated with tribal culture and puts on a new one that is beyond ethnicity. Jingala's resistance to the emerging western modernity has failed since modernity has transformed him to the point of obcession as manifested in his act of going about with dysfunctional products of capitalism and modernity such as watches and keys, and also as symbolized by his death.

Nationalistic otherness has also been constructed using acts of attachment and self-identification with the collectivity called the Nyasa nation. These two aspects are observed in

some characters but are absent in others. Attachment is examined by looking at the characters' psychological and physical connection with the nation. Considering that there are numerous problems which the colonial Nyasa nation-state has created in the lives of the natives as "the other" some of the characters are presented as having lost their attachment to the nation and are dreaming of far away lands as places where they belong. As Nira Yuval-Davis et al (2006) advises, a sense of belonging is expressed when people, and in this case characters, feel the attachment to the collectivity and believe that they have rights and duties as members of that collectivity. The critics reiterate that belonging involves constructing and maintaining the boundaries of the community, in this case the nation that separates people into members and non-members. Characters like Muchona typify this lack of attachment for he is prepared to leave the country for good.

At the same time, it must be emphasized that the goal of constructing 'national identity' is to 'obtain legitimacy of the present, since the nation is regarded as one continuous process' (Jurt 2003: 28). Kayira demonstrates that the colonial Nyasa nation lacks that kind of legitimacy through the actions of the village chief. Kayira has made two contrasting constructions to this effect. On the one hand, he has constructed a recurring narrative of Chimaliro village as one people who belong to the Nyasa nation by descent and historical territory. These people are portrayed historically as a homogeneous group if the quotation that follows is anything to go by: "The most important thing we want you to know is that we are one people and have always been like that" (p.97). The quotation is referring to members of Jingala's tribe but this group has been presented as related to other tribes in the country to such an extent that the chief in Jingala's village and members of his delegation often visits other chiefs in their areas and in turn he is visited by them once in a while. On the other hand, Nyasaland has been denied a similar narrative of oneness using flags as specific symbols of national imagination. A flag is not just an object but it is also a narrative of collective history,

identity and belonging. In the text, it is implied that there is a national flag, the Union Jack with a fixed combination of colours and certain emblems. This flag is being emulated by the chief who devises and mounts the tribe's own version of it as a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of a common history, colonial nation imagination and belonging which the Union Jack represents (p.89). In contrast to the Union Jack, Kayira writes:

> "In addition to the small table, the chair, and the book, there were two leopard skins on the wall and a lion skin on the floor. On sunny days the chief also flew a flag in front of his big house and the flag consisted, very simply, of any cloth of any colour that he could pick so that it was quite common to see different flags on different days" (p. 89).

The flag which the chief flies in front of his "big house" with its de facto coat of arms in form of the lion and the leopard skins is different from the national flag, the Union Jack. This flag is most likely flown as a sign of subversion to the idea of belonging to the Nyasa nation-state. In the same vein, Kayira has constructed Chimaliro Village as having its own council of elders headed by the village-chief. This council performs duties that would ensure the welfare of the community. As the novel puts it, the council meets once a month under one of the Muyombo trees where council members discuss village affairs, try civil cases, and receive official visitors to the village. The council is also responsible for the maintenance of discipline in the village (p.59). From the description of the roles of the village council provided in the novel, I observe that they are wide ranging and cover almost all dimensions that would ensure people's welfare in a manner that parallels those of the Nyasa nation-state in further attempt at disassociating Chimaliro Village from the Nyasa nation-state. And the main character, Jingala feels his rights to raise his son according to the dictates of his tribal culture which are very different from those of the Nyasa nation-state have been taken away, signaling that there are efforts by the people to live their lives outside the dictates and

expectations of the Nyasa nation-state. According to Milton et al (2013), people belong to a collectivity because it provides for them and they in turn feel they have a place and a role to play in that collectivity and their voices are heard by those in authority. That is not the case with Jingala and the village-chief in the text under study. When a person is being forbidden to socialize his children according to the requirements of his tribe or when his values, beliefs and customs are not being considered as central to national imagination and identity, the person's sense of belonging to the nation is put into question. Emulation of foreign practices and forms of social organization through formal education, imposition of foreign customs and others leading to the physical death of the protagonist, Jingala may be viewed as Kayira's act of delegitimizing the homogenizing agenda of the colonial Nyasa nation-state and by extension, his act of questioning the local people's belonging to the Nyasaland as a nation-state. In this text, it is the combined actions of the youths that have led to Jingala's death. My reading of it is that the creation of the Nyasa nation based on principles of western modernity has greatly diminished the tribal identity. It is fair therefore to assert that western modernity to which the Nyasaland nation-state is aligned is presented as a violent phenomenon in people's collective identities especially their tribal identities. What was previously a functioning society (tribal society), essentially at par with the modern nation has been unsettled in the name of progress that has replaced existing terminologies and modernized social structures even when the basic operations and outcomes are the same. Jingala's household is in a state of disarray and both him and the chief are portrayed as antiques or people who have become increasingly irrelevant to the modern nation of formal education and technology since they go about with dead watches (p. 95). But considering the fact that the overall frame of the story is tragi-comic, it is not very clear what Kayira's position is. On the one hand the setting of the story, Chimaliro Village (literary translated as village of death/mourning) as a microcosm of the nation creates an impression that Kayira's politics is

that the nation is a death-creating institution to local people's tribal identities. On the other, kayira's act of satirizing elements of tradition show that he does not favour a national formation that is based on traditional ethnic values. This ambiguity is in line with Homi Bhabha (1990:3) who argues, "[n]arrating the nation is a complex processes through which people negotiate their relationship to the nation with which they identify by constructing narratives that define the boundaries of the nation and their sense of belonging to that nation". Therefore it is easy for a writer to find himself or herself in a similar position as Kayira in narrating the nation.

In further attempt at explaining the idea of belonging to the nation, Fanon (1963:73) talks about a postcolonial social reality marked by territorialism which, in most cases, leads to miro-nationalism which some groups, according to the situation, utilize to justify or reject their belonging to the nation. In relation to Bhabha's and Fanon's sentiments referenced above, the people of Chimaliro Village to which the main character, Jingala belongs use descent, certain customs and historical settlement in that particular territory to justify and at the same time contest their belonging to the Nyasaland nation.

A sense of belonging has been a political tool during the fight for independence and after in many formerly colonized lands. With the construction of colonial nation-states in Africa and elsewhere, a perception had been created that one belonged to his or her nation-state more than anything else. Generally, in Africa people believe that they belong to the land where they have historically settled and use recognition by their ancestors as foundations for claiming their sense of belonging to the nation-state. Jingala, for example, is frequently visited by the ancestors through dreams either to inform him of what is coming ahead or to warn him of the impending disasters as is the case with the failure of his wedding to Liz and Gregory's rebellion in joining the missionaries (p.79-80). The surreal phenomenon in Jingala's dreams such as the dragon and the swapping of brides between himself and his son,

Gregory are, therefore, meant to underscore the strangeness of the nationhood when Malawians were under cplonial rule. Before his final rebellion, Gregory too is visited by the ancestors who try to entice him to the ethnic group as the last resort when it is apparent that his father's efforts are not bearing fruit. As a way of asserting the fact that in spite of his rebellion Gregory belongs to the natural nation by virtue of being born to Chimalirians, the spirits of the ancestors appear to him in form of the soro bird which leads him to a honey nest in the wild at the most critical time when he is contemplating whether or not to flee the village for good and go back to his school (p.125-6). This intervention by the ancestors is an indication that national identity is related to people's sense of rootedness to the socio-geographical space of the Nyasa nation-state that was once inhabited by indigenous ancestors. Kayira himself expressed this sense of belonging to his land and ancestors when, as Mary Okeke (2012) reports, he demanded that when he dies, his body be flown to his home so he could be buried together with his ancestors.

In Zimbabwe, Yvonne Vera's novel, *Nehanda* shows that Africans belong to their ancestors who look after them, protect and guide them as demonstrated during that country's liberation struggle against colonialists (Christiansen, 2004). The main character, Nehanda is portrayed as a spirit medium in touch with the ancestors who, because they once settled and lived in a particular area, have made their presence felt in the vegetation, water, soil, air and other elements of the physical environment in those rural areas. In short, the spirits in *Nehanda* represent the nation to which black Zimbabweans belong by virtue of being part of the physical environment of the countryside and being recognized by the spirits of the ancestors while the white settlers are part of the civilized urban space. Since the urban space is viewed as artificial in comparison to the 'natural' rural, Vera's depiction is meant to assert black ownership of the country, Zimbabwe. The politics of belonging, therefore, comes in when Vera depicts Africans as belonging to their land which recognizes them through the spirits of

the ancestors but does not recognize the white colonialists who have occupied it. So by virtue of the local people's harmony with the original founders of their nation who are now departed, Vera asserts that they belong to the nation and hence dismisses the settler nation as artificial which ought to be replaced by the 'real' or 'natural' nation in which black people are at the centre of everything.

In *Jingala,* there is both modernist nationalism which focuses on colonial definition of nation on the one hand and an inward-looking primordial nationalism on the other which is unwilling to repudiate tradition completely as witnessed by Jingala's act of sticking to traditional ideals and forms of identity. Legson Kayira's use of the portrait of the artist as a young man technique in this novel is mainly done with the view to underscore his belief that colonialism disrupted tribes and created unsettled national identities and a sense of belonging in Africa. The description of Gregory as "tall, with round face, healthy cheeks, smart, short hair parted on the left …" (p.17) for example, resembles Legson Kayira's description of himself as provided in his autobiography titled *I Will Try* which he had published earlier. Besides, the location and the description of St Bonface Boarding school as a missionary school 'built on a high plateau overlooking the great lake on the east and flanked on the west by small hills, with a dangerous road that climbs up the school' (p.17) resembles Kayira's secondary school, Livingstonia also in *I Will Try*. In composing *Jingala*, Legson Kayira as a writer was reflecting on how modernity had and continues to transform tribal identities in African societies by drawing examples from his own experiences. Formal education as an element of the colonial Nyasa nation-state is indicted for taking children away from their tribal cultures and twisting their values and perceptions about themselves. In the novel, Jingala's unsuccessful resistance to the ideals of the colonial Nyasa nation-state and the erosion of his traditional culture as signaled by symbols of antiquity such as his stoop and near deaf state of his ears, dead watches and a dysfunctional bunch of keys which he has

hung on his belt, show stark differences between desired reality and actual reality (p.1). It is mockery at its best as Jingala looks awkward wherever he goes and carries with him an aura of irrelevance to the modern Nyasa nation. No wonder students at St Bonface Boarding School mock him that he looks like he has just come out of the jungle: a typical savage (p.16). Since satire is often employed for its ideological significance, this gap between Jingala's life and the one prescribed by the colonial nation-state is Kayira's way of showing that Jingala and the people he represents do not belong to the nation-state. It is as if they are dead or do not exist in the nation since what they stand for is not the focus of the nation and its aspirations. Further reference to the death of traditional culture is contained in the following exchange between Jingala and his brother in-law Duka Monje as further rejection of local people's belonging to the colonial Nyasa nation:

> "You ask me what happened to the spirits?" Jingala cried and took an examining look at the other man.
>
> "I have heard much about the spirits and I have many times wondered in my mind as to what really became of them", Duka said apologetically.
>
> "They died, Jingala said knowledgeably but his voice sounded rather sad. "The white man killed all of them. When I was a boy, it was not uncommon to go out at night and find ghosts roaming about" (p. 55).

In the above exchange, Jingala laments that the strong interaction which was there between the living and the dead prior to colonization no longer exists as civilization and modernity brought to Africa by colonialism prevents the communion between the spirits of the ancestors and the people. In addition, the death of Jingala himself at the end of the novel symbolizes the death of traditional culture in the face of modernity and the resultant construction of the colonial Nyasa identity to which the old generation do not feel a sense of belonging. It

appears to me that there is a certain level and even form of knowledge that qualifies someone to belong to the Nyasa nation-state which Jingala does not have. This is so because he and his cronies in Chimaliro Village lack the necessary pre-requisites to fully function in the life of the modern nation-state such as the Nyasa nation-state. A nation being a modern construct survives on certain knowledge associated with formal education, technology and modern culture. Since most of the natives represented by Jingala and the village-chief do not have this kind of knowledge, the scenario may be viewed as Kayira's way of rejecting the colonial Nyasa nation as a nation for the natives, making it an artificial nation that needed to be reconstructed to accommodate everybody. As it is, the ideology being constructed by colonialists is that in order to be regarded as a "MuNyasa" one had to be formally educated in the national curriculum whose goal was to make the next generation better than the existing one through education, technology and creativity which the likes of Jingala do not subscribe to. As Father Edwards sees it, Jingala is an embodiment of ignorance and primitivism with little of relevance to the colonial Nyasa nation. However, this conflation of ignorance as knowledge and vice versa about the workings of the nation is deliberately used to determine who is in and who is out of the colonial Nyasa nation. Although Jingala had worked as a local tax collector until retirement, the narrator states that Jingala himself often confessed that he had been collecting money on behalf of the government about which he knew very little (p. 10). The department for which Jingala worked is a structure of the colonial nation-state such that Jingala's ignorance of it highlights the author's attempt at showing that Jingala does not psychologically belong to the colonial nation since belonging to a collectivity entails having intricate knowledge about its workings.

Structurally speaking, the story of Jingala is a tragi-comedy in which the portrait of a young man as an artist technique that has culminated in Gregory attaining a new identity may be construed as representing the birth of the colonial Nyasa identity. Gregory has survived at the

expense of his father, Jingala. This would signify that the new national identity which Gregory embodies is a product of colonial violence in which the black people's traditional cultural heritage is violently changed and lost. In addition, Jingala and the entire village of Chimaliro cannot tolerate Gregory's conversion to Christianity and becoming a Roman Catholic priest as witnessed at the end of the story where Duka and Kayiteke literally chase Gregory away from the village proclaiming that he does not belong there. Through this incident, the author raises a serious question: Will Nyasaland become a multi-religious and multi-racial nation only in name where superficial forms of diversity are tolerated and to which everybody feels a sense of belonging?

As it stands, Kayira has extensively explored the question of belonging to the Nyasa nation by using the child motif. One of the scholars on Legson Kayira, Bharat Meenakshi (2003) has observed that there is an extensive use of the child motif in postcolonial African literature in general and Legson Kayira's *Jingala* in particular. The critic argues that historically and even sociologically, the child is seen as a representative of the health of the society since children are part of the home which is often used as a symbol for the nation in literature. The critic categorizes three dimensions in which African writers use the child motif. The first one is child as orphan while the second one is use of a normal child and the third one is use of a problematic child. He further notes that when an orphan is used, he or she becomes an ideological commentary on the burning problem of the instability of the postcolonial identity and the consequent need to reformulate it. In this regard, the critic argues that the loss of the child's parents may be equated to statelessness, lack of concrete identity or crisis of identity in general. On the use of the child motif in Legson Kayira's *Jingala*, Meenakshi argues that Kayira has used the child to address various problems that beset postcolonial Africa such that Gregory's consciousness can be used for analyzing the situation and as a means for seeking recovery from the ills that have assailed the land.

Similarly, Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Writers in Politics* (1982) argues that the aim for employing the child motif in African fiction may be diagnostic, prescriptive or even therapeutic. Meenakshi's comment on the use to which African writers put the child motif ties up with Ngugi's strong belief that writing is essentially a political act. As far as Ngugi is concerned, a writer may employ the child motif to achieve some political or rhetorical aims. Ngugi reiterates that in using a child motif, it becomes incumbent upon writers to identify the subject of their critique, point out the critiquing tools and come up with a viable strategy. Needless to say that the presence of a child in an African literary work is not adequate if the writer does not come up with a clear subject for critique and a viable strategy through which the child motif is used to effectively interrogate the contemporary socio-political reality. In *Jingala*, according to Meenakshi as quoted earlier, Kayira's major concern is the acculturation of the African child through western education that leads to loss of his tribal identity. Since children are the future of the nation, this implies that the novel is concerned with the development of national identity in which Gregory's childhood becomes a site for the consolidation of colonial Nyasa identity with debilitating effects on the child's ethnic identity. This is achieved by ensuring that Gregory, now in standard nine, loses his sense of ethnic identity due to the influence of western education which he has received since the knowledge that Gregory has acquired through formal schooling has put him at loggerheads with his own tribal culture. I note that Gregory is not only an orphan following the untimely death of his mother and later that of his father, but that he is also a problematic child who rebels against his blood relations and runs away to live with his teachers who happen to be white Roman Catholic priests. Kayira may have employed this child motif to highlight a troubled national identity and engage the issue of belonging to the nation by using the conflict between tradition and modernity which is presented as a dichotomy through which the people search for their identity during the colonial era and beyond. As Renan in his

popular essay, 'What is a Nation?' argues, a nation is known for its emotional attachment which people have towards it as an expression of their sense of belonging to that nation, the lack of which is demonstrated by Gregory. Besides Gregory, the other youths such as Liz and Muchona also show no remarkable emotional attachment to the Nyasa nation-state by opting to leave it permanently. Muchona wants to leave the village altogether and settle in South Africa for good if the following statement is anything to go by:

> "Last time I left this village for the mines – that was exactly four years ago – I vowed to myself that I was going to live and die in the town [Johannesburg]" (p. 107).

And later on he tells Liz the following as the two elope:

> "We shall leave the village, you and I and we shall never come back again" (p. 145).

Even Gregory once told his father he would run away from the village and never come back or he might, in fact do something else that was worse than running away from home (p.103). It is tempting to say that the youths in this text have an alternative sense of belonging. Their act of rebelling against their parents and running away from their people in search of a new life and a new identity bears testimony to that. These youths no longer feel they belong to the collectivity (nation) which they view as oppressive, limiting and backward yet that collectivity has been presented as a founding stone on which the country's nationhood is constructed.

3.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter has explored how various definitions of the Nyasa national identity and a sense of belonging to that nation are constructed and contested through discourses of exclusion and inclusion. Some of these discourses purport to depict Nyasaland as a multi-racial and multi-ethnic nation while others attempt to portray it as a Christian nation. And

then there is yet another reality regarding the Nyasa national identity which the chapter has touched on whereby Nyasaland is depicted as a 'South-Africanized' nation. In this context, the chapter has explored how Kayira's portrayal of national identity veers into internationality as some characters shift their sense of belonging and psychological attachment away from Nyasaland and the tribal group they belong to. This is achieved using the rebellious child motif in which some of the African youths find their ethnic cultures oppressive and their colonial Nyasa nation deficient to meet their ever-growing aspirations, needs and visions of life marked by freedom and consumerism associated with cosmopolitanism which the South African urban culture represents. By constructing the collective identity of the colonial Nyasa nation through the three narratives embedded with *Jingala* highlighted in this chapter, Kayira registers his contestations of the fact that the Nyasa nation is a unified and stable nation with a homogeneous collective national identity. While exploring the question of the country's national identity, there are also certain issues which Kayira is raising one of which is that the construction of the Nyasa national identity robbed the natives of their 'real' selves (cultural heritage). This view echoes the victimhood image of the people who make up the nation represented by the protagonist, Jingala. The chapter has demonstrated that in order to highlight that aspect, the writer has relied on the tragic genre of the novel which is at the same time employing the portrait of a young man as an artist technique in which the construction of the new Nyasa identity is achieved by diminishing earlier identities. The idea of belonging to the colonial Nyasa nation has partly been constructed using the historical belonging to the fictitious ethnic Chimaliro Village through which characters claim their belonging to the wider Nyasa nation. However, there are acts of subversion such as acts of mounting alternative flags to the national flag and wearing of loin cloths instead of adhering to the prescribed national dress codes as acts which suggest that colonised people were contesting their belonging to the colonial Nyasa nation. In

addition there is the element of recognition or lack thereof by the spirits of the ancestors and use of other surreal phenomena which have also been used to assert black people's identification with the natural but suppressed nation and to portray the artificiality of the colonial Nyasa nation to the natives in the search for an ideal mode of social organization and control in the form of internationality. The internal contradictions that exist in the process of defining the country's national identity, however, demonstrate that narrating the nation is a highly complex affair.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR: The role of Myths, Rituals and Symbols in Constructing Malawi's National Character in *The Looming Shadow*

"The past is knocking constantly on the doors of our perception, refusing to be forgotten, because it is deeply embedded in the present. To neglect it at this most crucial of moments in our history is to postpone the future".

(Njabulo S. Ndebele, 1994: 158)

4.1 Introduction

The novel, *The Looming Shadow* places myths, rituals and symbols at the centre of its narrative and uses them to highlight the root cause of the character of the nation. Myths, as most scholars have argued, are not only ancient supernatural fantasy stories but also new inventions usually constructed during the time of political or ideological upheavals such as during colonial domination, the fight for independence, dictatorship or war. Myths, therefore, may be pure fantasy, or they may be based on real events and about real people. Leaders in power can construct myths about themselves or distort existing ones to perpetuate their rule. Alternatively, the masses may also create myths for similar and sometimes opposite objectives. As Anthony D. Smith (1999) puts it, mythical thinking is not a thing of the past but characteristic of human beings in every historical epoch. Hence, in whatever scenario where myths and counter-myths occur, such constructions serve ideological and political purposes. Myths are tied up with beliefs, history and politics, and may appear in form of stories or anecdotes. No wonder myths are important elements for understanding the nation for they construct and contest nationhood, national history, identity and character. On their part, rituals and symbols are linked to what Anthony D. Smith calls collective self-consciousness, something which is central to construction of national character. Commenting on rituals, John Kleinen (1999) cautions that rituals should never be regarded as anti-modern

or incompatible with the rational modernization process associated with the modern nation-state, instead they should be viewed as crucial in the life of modern imagined communities.

This chapter explores the role of symbols, myths and rituals in imagining the nation and constructing its character, in particular, the paternalistic character of the postcolonial Malawi nation. The chapter, therefore, demonstrates how Legson Kayira constructs and critiques the character of the nation by exposing the physical and psychological violence it promotes at the local society level that have come to characterize the Malawi nation-state as a mode of social organization and control originally meant to guarantee unity, justice, equality and protection of the people. What is more striking is the fact that this violence and exploitation is presented as rooted in the country's tribal culture which is reflected in the myths and rituals that have been instrumental in the construction of the nation. In essence, the chapter explores the relationship between ethnicity and nationhood to show how the violence, hero worshipping, jealousies and hatred associated with ethnic life which the novel highlights have given rise to the kind of nation that Malawi is. The interest in myths stems from the fact that the nation is, by its very nature, a myth made up of several other myths (Kumwenda, 2009). According to Geisler (2005), a nation is a myth fabricated mostly by intellectuals, artists and other elites who weave what they consider to be the cultural, ethnic and historical characteristics of a particular population into a powerful narrative called a nation.

In framing my discussion, the postcolonial Malawi nation is viewed as a modern construct which draws upon older forms of social existence such as chiefdoms and the colonial nation whose features have survived until the present time but only manifest as symbols, myths and images. For this reason, I read the novel with respect to the theory of ethnosymbolism as propounded by Anthony D. Smith (2009), to adequately explore how Legson Kayira has constructed the character of the Malawi nation using myths, rituals and symbols. I therefore highlight the problematics of the nation which Kayira has engaged. The ethnosymbolic

approach of understanding nations places great emphasis on the centrality of symbolic elements namely: myths, rituals, images, memories, traditions and values in the formation and sustenance of nations, and is based on the belief that a historically deep ethnic foundation is a pre-requisite for the formation and continued survival of a modern nation. As Gerald and Vajda (1986) observe, *The Looming Shadow*, with its focus on myth, ritual and symbolism, should be regarded as a window to knowing Kayira's outlook on the character of the Malawi nation.

The Looming Shadow was published in 1967, three years after the country gained its political independence from the British. The story of *The Looming Shadow* opens with the occurrence of an eclipse of the sun as a natural phenomenon and centres on how Kavukuku Village under Chief Yotamu Mwenimuzi deals with witchcraft that culminates in the government crackdown on the village's attempts at asserting its cultural autonomy. There has been brewing hatred between two men, Matenda and Mushani who are actually brothers-in-marriage ever since Mushani eloped with Nachele some twenty years ago. Nachele happens to be the younger sister to Matenda's wife and was Matenda's next target for marriage at the time he married her elder sister. Things did not work out as Matenda had planned since his wife's younger sister fell for Mushani. In highlighting the level of hatred between the two men, the narrator reports that when Mushani and Nachele fail to bear children, Mushani points his fingers at Matenda and the death of Matenda's one year old boy is blamed on Mushani. The two men have fought physically on several occasions at beer drinking parties. Later, Matenda falls sick and the most powerful witchdoctor (traditional healer) in the area, the 'great' Simbwindimbwi deduces, whether correctly or wrongly, that Matenda has been bewitched by Mushani who vehemently denies the accusation. This prompts the village headman to conduct a traditional witch-hunting ritual to confirm whether Mushani is indeed the witch. The ritual in question has been banned by the government as it involves forcing the

accuser and the accused to publicly drink 'mwavi', a traditional herbal poison at an open gathering of villagers'. The poison works as a tool of the ancestors and does so based on the belief that the innocent never get affected by it while the guilty do. The chief has modified the ritual somewhat to suit the changing times and administers the poison on two doves representing the accuser (Simbwindimbwi) and the accused (Mushani) respectively instead of the actual human beings. The outcome works in favour of the accused, Mushani as Simbwindimbwi's pigeon dies soon after taking the 'mwavi' but the ritual divides the villagers. It also creates a rift between Chief Yotamu Mwenimuzi and Mushani on the one hand and the witchdoctor, and the sick man's relatives on the other. Matenda's sickness worsens and he eventually dies and is buried. Following his burial, his son and brother set Mushani's house on fire one night and the police comes in to make arrests including the village headman as the Catholic priest, Father Puccinni is visiting the village. The witchdoctor, Simbwindimbwi escapes and the hunt for him is futile on account that the doctor allegedly uses supernatural powers to avert arrest. It is alleged that Simbwindimbwi has magical powers which he can use to turn himself into animate and inanimate objects. As the story ends, the chief has been sentenced to one year in prison while the arsonists will serve six years imprisonment with hard labour.

4.2 Symbols and Allegories of the Nation in *The Looming Shadow*

The Looming Shadow sounds like a play, presenting a series of scenes which are often rich in dialogue but with very little obvious 'message' attached to any of the scenes. Since drama is often not regarded serious action, such a mode of presentation is likely done to show that some of the things that have come to characterize Malawi as a nation are petty. As a whole, the novel is ironic and open to multiple interpretations highlighting the contentious nature of the country's nationhood and its character. For example, the village headman seems to question the existence of the very tradition of witchcraft which has survived among his

people since time immemorial and which has helped define them as a people. Also instead of promoting unity in his village the chief is in the forefront sowing seeds of discord if his actions towards some of his subjects are considered. There is an incident in which the village chief, the person regarded as a promoter of unity among his subjects, expels Simbwindimbwi from the village. In that incident, Simbwindimbwi is treated with contempt like an outsider, a thing that attracts a harsh reaction from an onlooker, Simeon who is regarded as a fool in the village:

> At that moment Mwenimuzi dashed forward and grabbed the doctor's arm, shouting through clenched teeth, "Out! Away! Now!"
>
> "I am going," Simbwindimbwi said, "but, first of all, I want to tell my friends here that you are expelling me from this village because you don't like me, because you think I am a fake, because you ..."
>
> "This is ominous," Simeon said from among the crowd, shaking his head as he said it. "Whoever heard of a chief fighting with his men?"(p.120).

Susan Andrade (2011) opens the possibility of reading a story that focuses on small units such as a family as 'the nation writ small' in which writers deploy the domestic or familial stories to expose national realities. In my view, some African male writers, in this case Legson Kayira, have focused their narratives on the village (tribe) as the 'nation writ small'. The idea of the village or tribe as an allegory for the nation is significant for it allows for the exploration of various images that the nation or its leaders wear as representatives of the Malawi nation. As Andrade (2011) further observes, male pioneer African writers among which we could count Legson Kayira represent a clear relation between their main characters and the nation by using allegorical figures or by making certain groups and public political acts central to their plots as a way of addressing national politics. In that regard, I opine that

the village headman, Simbwindimbwi and the legendary Mlozi are allegorical figures representing the character of the Malawi nation representing the traditional, the cultural and the historical aspects of the nation respectively.

I also take cue from Fredric Jameson's (1986) view that narratives from the Third World (particularly formerly colonized countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America) are inherently allegorical and that the allegory is always national because nationalism plays a significant role in the imaginative literature of the colonized (p.69). As Jameson puts it, for a story to function as an allegory, such a story must communicate whatever it communicates at two levels, the literal and the figural. And according to Babker (2016: 90), the allegorization of the nation which Fredric Jameson talks about "is often realised through the depiction of objects, people and the nation itself through images and symbols".

Perhaps the starting point of the symbolic representation of the nation should be an assertion of the fact that symbols and the idea and representation of a nation are inseparable. This is so because national realities generate symbols and figures that signify and define the character of the nation. As Geisler (2005) notes, in constructing a nation, the culture, history and characteristics of a particular group constituting a nation are shaped into myths, symbols and images which ultimately give meaning and visibility to the abstractions of nationalism. Anthony D. Smith (1986) corroboratively argues that even when nations are a product of modernity it is possible to find ethnic elements that have survived until modern times. When narrating the nation through fiction, therefore, we need to pay close attention to the symbols the author has used and acknowledge that the role they play in the construction and sustenance of the nation which is not only contextual but also ongoing as national symbols may be realized, renegotiated, recycled, rewritten, reconfirmed or challenged. As Geisler further points out, "while acknowledging the fact that the nation is a narrative, we also need

to acknowledge that the conflicts between competing definitions of a particular national narrative is emblematized by different symbols" (ibid, p.17).

It appears to me that Kayira's use of symbolism and imagery in *The Looming Shadow* is so systematic that for every symbol that constructs the modern nation-state, he is constructing a discourse or a counter-discourse about a well-known character of the Malawi nation. As already alluded to, Kavukuku Village serves as a symbol of the nation. The local history and troubles that have come to symbolize the larger and more important national predicaments are all registered on this village. As Jasper Dag Tjaden (2012) argues, the 'real' nation can only be found among the lower classes, especially in the countryside of the poor rural majority. This view is shared by Barnard (2003) who once stated that the true character of a nation can only be found among the rural peasantry. The people of Kavukuku Village have been ruled by the same family since time immemorial as the father and grandfather of the current chief were chiefs during their own time. In a show of continuous existence of biological kinship, there is communal eating where all men take their meals, especially supper, in one place and all the womenfolk also take theirs in another place near the chief's house (p. 42). The village also holds various ceremonies where all the people come together. These ceremonies go down a long way in the history of the village. Further to this, the chief visits his fellow chiefs with whom the village has blood ties periodically and he too receives them as visitors to the village. This shows that ultimately, the entire nation is made up of communities that are ethnically interconnected in one way or another as historical evidence of belonging to a territorial collectivity (Louissi and Grosby, 2007: 6). Therefore, at the literal level, the common origins of the people can be traced to their common roots and cultural practices. But in a typical ethnosymbolic nation which Kayira is trying to construct, moral rules and conventions of conduct (societas) and common purpose (universitas) (to quote Michael Oakeshott, 1975) are supposed to merge into a single identity centering around

common history and ancestry. This seems the case with Kavukuku Village since the major historical events of the nation often regarded as responsible for the character of the nation are all registered on it. One thing: the people are depicted as obeying the chief without questioning. This masculinist tendency manifests several times in the chief's interactions with his subjects. When he is arrested, nobody steps forward to take over the chieftainship until his wife, only identified as "the queen" decides to fill the void. Since the three historical events central to the construction of the Malawi nation namely: slave raiding, missionary activities and colonization in that order are all dramatized on the village space, one is compelled to conclude that what is happening in Kavukuku Village on the time continuum is allegorzing what has been happening in the nation.

Secondly for a nation to exist there must be a symbolic representation of the territory which when acknowledged, becomes part of the understanding of "the self" and creates what Louissi and Grosby (2007) have called a territorial kinship. In *The Looming Shadow*, the Nyika Plateau is the symbol of the nation's territory. The plateau is described and mentioned so many times in the novel as "Nyika Plateau", "the mountain" or simply "the plateau" or "the hill". For any territory to serve as a symbol of the nation, it must offer or evoke certain significance in the minds of the citizens. In Malawi, the Nyika Plateau is iconic as it is the largest plateau and currently houses the famous Nyika National Park, the country's largest national park. The pictures of its landscape and wildlife appear in most magazines and other materials used by the Malawi Tourism Board and the mother ministry, the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Wildlife for promoting the country to local and foreign potential tourists. To most Malawians, Nyika Plateau represents the beauty of Malawi's physical landscape but in *The Looming Shadow*, Nyika Plateau is also the home of the spirits of the ancestors for 'that is where they roam freely' (p.94). Kayira uses this physical feature to construct the Malawi nation by positing that Malawi is a nation due in part to people's association with this

plateau across different epochs of history. The people of Kavukuku Village have had unbreakable attachment with this plateau which they have always called their homeland (p.136). The village has always been in the valley below and generations upon generations have hunted, played and grazed on the plateau. Whenever the people of Kavukuku Village define themselves as a people they do so in relation to the plateau and the valley below, and when Simbwindimbwi is persecuted by the police officers and flees the village, he hides in the mountains (the plateau) (p.144). Although the Malawi nation is constructed around the shared symbolic territory such as the Nyika Plateau and Lake Malawi and the valley below, the novel, *The Looming Shadow* also shows that the country is riddled with internal conflicts, disagreements and lack of unity. My reading that Nyika Plateau is a symbol of the nation stems from Kayira's act of linking major historical events that are central to the construction of the Malawi nation to this plateau such as the activities of the Arab slave trader named Mlozi. The legendary Mlozi terrorized the Nyasaland territory for slaves. Historically speaking, Mlozi of Arab origin had settled in the southern part of Malawi where he raided villages for slaves some years before the arrival of British colonialists with their campaign to establish a protectorate and end slavery. In *The Looming Shadow* as a work of fiction, it is not surprising that Mlozi and his men are believed to be residing in the thick dark forest of the Nyika Plateau, sharing the place with dangerous creatures and ghosts (p.94). Abolition of slave trade was one of the motivations for declaring the territory that is today called Malawi a British Protectorate. Thus, stopping slave trade was the root cause for the construction of the Malawi nation historically speaking. The fact that Mlozi was residing in the thick dark forest of the Nyika Plateau is significant in symbolizing the nation, Malawi whose construction was called for following the need to stop slave raids as already alluded to. The story, however, focuses on violence and the mysterious character of Mlozi such as his cruelty as defining the character of the nation as follows:

> You must remember that neither of us had ever seen this man called Mlozi but from the galloping rumors and the various versions of the legend that had come our way, we knew that he was some sort of a cruel superman, virtually invincible … (p. 98).

The writer draws parallels between the hunt for Mlozi many years ago and that of Simbwindimbwi in the present. Both of these hunting escapades involve the Nyika Plateau as he links the suffering of the past to those of the present since a nation is constructed through history that establishes continuity. While the parallel between the two cruel and violent, masculinist figures is established, the narrator is, however clear, that the Mlozi episode happened thirty years before the narrative present of the novel and importantly it is conveyed to us the readers through a story told by the village headman. It is reported that the father to Mwenimuzi, who was the village headman then, was severely beaten for showing signs of protest against poor treatment by the white colonialists during the hunt for Mlozi that he died two weeks upon their return when he says,

> "We literally run home singing and whistling ….and cursing the poor Europeans all the way home …but my father was never well again and he died only a few weeks after" (p.102).

The manner in which Mlozi and Simbwindimbwi are hunted in the text mirrors the manner in which the chief's father and the chief himself are tortured by a more powerful masculinist force and all these are taking place around the Nyika plateau. The juxtaposition of the hunt for Mlozi with that for Simbwindimbwi highlights endemic violence in society that spans several generations. By linking the chief's arrest, the hunt for both Simbwindimbwi and that for Mlozi to Nyika Plateau Kayira might be revealing the true nature of the Malawi nation as violent and masculinist.

The Malawi nation is also allegorized by the coming together of tradition, Christianity and state power during the hunt for Simbwindimbwi and Mlozi, and the arrest of the village chief. In *The Looming Shadow*, Christianity is mainly propagated by Simeon the Watchtower evangelist and Father Puccinni of the Roman Catholic Church. This religion encourages respect for the law and those in authority among other principles. I note that there is collusion between the nation-state power and Christianity during the chief's arrest since the arrest has taken place while Father Puccinni of the Roman Catholic Church is visiting the village and he does nothing to stop it. In fact he is seen helping the police by informing them of the direction in which Simbwindimbwi has disappeared (p.137-142). This collusion allegorizes the manner in which the Malawi nation was constructed, that is, through the collaborative efforts of Christian missionaries and the colonial power, over the territory of which the current chief is the custodian on behalf of his subjects. The collusion between the state and Christianity may also be viewed as pointing to the fact that citizens of the modern Malawian nation-state are subdued members with no say. The territory on which these dramas are taking place has been ruled by members of the chief's family for generations such that the drama which is witnessed in Kavukuku Village during the hunt for Simbwindimbwi, that of the historic Mlozi and the arrest of the current Chief Yotamu Mwenimuzi carry semblance to what the territory which is today referred to as Malawi experienced during the process of nation formation. That is why in trying to present Christian activism at work through the efforts of Simeon the religious fanatic, Kayira presents his Watchtower Church as coming from Scotland to echo a historical fact whereby the original Christian missions which settled in the Malawi territory came from Scotland. Historically speaking, the Malawian nation state was linked to the Scottish missionaries such as Dr David Livingstone and later, Dr Robert Laws who lobbied the British parliament for the creation of a Nyasaland protectorate which

later became Malawi (Pike, 1965). In linking the Chritian mission and the creation of the Malawi nation-state the narrator states:

> **"**Sunday afternoon was very quiet and serene. The day itself was still and the immense sky, with the exception of a few clouds in strange geometrical formation hanging in one corner of it, was clear and blue. People had already returned from the church, where they always reminded themselves of their debt to Scotland and spoke of that country in terms as glorious as though Christ Himself live there" (p. 82).

Scotland is not only the origin of the church but the creation of the nation-state is indebted to her. The author is therefore being allegorical in his representation of the church which is later shown 'looking on' as violence is taking place. In Kayira's view reflected in the above quotation, Scotland (or the United Kingdom) represents both the colonizer in secular sense and the redeemer in religious sense.

4.3 How the Traditional Chewa Myths and Rituals Relate to Malawi's National Character

This section deals with myths, rituals and symbols in *The Looming Shadow* especially those that reveal the character of the nation, Malawi. Through the Chewa myths and rituals represented in *The Looming Shadow*, the Malawi nation is portrayed as a nation of petty violence, oppression, hero worshipping, envy and witchcraft carried over from tribal cultures. It is also portrayed as paternalistic as its dominant national character. What is more striking is the fact that these characteristics are presented as traits that are carried over from the tribal Chewa culture and the colonial culture from which the modern Malawi nation originates.

In his introduction to *The Looming Shadow,* Harold R. Collins observes that Kayira has painted a pessimistic picture of Africa's future, and by implication, Malawi's future where, as he puts it, the modern nation is the oppressor. His sentiment supports the idea that Kayira has

constructed a violent and paternalistic character of the Malawi nation. Collins expresses this view in the following lines:

> "The Looming Shadow of the title of this novel is the looming shadow of darkness left from antiquity, a reminder of their [the villagers'] past and the dictator of their present" (p. 11).

In agreement with Collins' reading of the text, the darkness called "the looming shadow" is rooted partly in the colonial culture and partly in the local people's cultural traditions, in particular the Chewa traditions that go a long way in the past and are 'refusing' to go away in the wake of the light that is modernity. Such a reading is corroborated by events in the novel such as restrictions placed on the villagers by the government to perform certain rituals the way their ancestors used to do, the oppressive Chewa cultural practices surrounding the treatment of presumed witches and actions of the colonial police officers.

The text opens with the eclipse of the sun, a phenomenon that portends death of the chief who in the novel has been used as the embodiment of the nation, hence its occurrence relates to the nation. The shadow is looming because the experiences which the former chief went through at the hands of colonialists are similar to the ones the current chief is going through when he is prohibited from conducting the historical ritual of witch-identification, is arrested and put in jail. The humiliation, torture and abuse which the chief goes through are felt by the local people as helpless victims in the process of construction and sustenance of the modern Malawi nation. The primordial Chewa nation (the Maravi Kingdom) from which Malawi draws its name was generally an oppressive society in which the rulers used the 'Nyau' and 'mwavi' practices to victimize their opponents and instilled fear in society (De Anguilar, 1995; Forster, 2001). It is interesting to note that in a text which was written after the country had gained independence the writer still included the oppressive cultural practices of the

ancient Chewa Kingdom such as the witch-hunting/identification ritual (mwavi). In addition, the chief himself has also been presented as the perpetrator of oppression in that he is not the kind of ruler who listens to his subjects but is authoritarian. Such features have come to characterize the modern nation-state. Although colonialism created modern nation-states that were meant to ultimately diminish traits associated with traditional culture, in reality that goal is far from being achieved such that it may end up not being achieved at all. As Abdelkader Babker (2016) observes, in Africa, traits associated with the modern nation will continue existing side by side with those of the ethnic groups for a long period to come.

By 'the dictator of their present', Collins quoted above is probably referring to the dictatorial tendencies of the otherwise wise chief Yotamu Mwenimuzi but most importantly to the nation-state as a modern construct which treats the villagers in a very oppressive manner. The oppression is felt not only by the chief whose suffering is articulated beyond the individual level but it spills over to his wife and subjects who must now live without him as their leader. In this respect, the ordeals of the village at the hands of the state power and those of Simbwindimbwi at the hands of the village chief which are all marked by violence are traces of deeply rooted traits of the nation. The hatred which the chief has for Simbwindimbwi is personal as both characters jostle for power and are obsessed with self-importance and hero worshipping, another of the nation's characteristics. Although their feud is a private affair, the intra-village politics spills into the public arena and assumes significance of national proportion as the state power moves in to make arrests echoing the historical national events involving state power and the previous village chief. This echoes Fredric Jameson's (1986) view that in African novels, the story of the private individual is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world society.

Kayira is concerned with administration of justice and maintenance of law and order in the country through his depiction of the 'mwavi' drinking ritual of the ancient Maravi (Chewa)

Kingdom. His focus is on how the administration of justice in the village compares with the same in the larger community called the nation-state with a clear sign that he regards the modern nation-state a better form of social organization than the tribe which Kavukuku Village typifies. For this reason, he has juxtaposed the 'mwavi' drinking ordeal with that of the court system to which the chief and the late Matenda's sons are subjected. According to Peter Forster (2001), use of 'mwavi' and other traditional forms of social justice were used in the ancient Maravi Kingdom as the chief had both political and judicial authority. This is an indication that witchcraft was widely practiced in the predecessor society to the modern Malawi nation which the novel brings forth as one of the lingering national characteristics. The tradition of witchcraft is portrayed as widely believed to exist among the people of Malawi since time immemorial and as key to defining them as a people. For Malawi, such elements lie buried in the collective psyche of the local people. Kayira's intention is, however, to show that the traditional forms of justice were crude. The myth of witchcraft or African magic manifests in what the people of Kavukuku Village believe to be the cause of Matenda's sickness. It also manifests in the supposed invincibility surrounding the traditional healer, Simbwindimbwi. The novel seems to emphasize that witchcraft is deeply rooted in people's day-to-day lives but is portrayed as one of the root causes of violence in society. In today's Malawian society media reports indicate that witchcraft is responsible for rampant cases of disappearances, murders and dismembering of people with albinism whose body parts are believed to be highly sought after as part of the traditional concoction to make people rich. It is important to note that Simbwindimbwi has not been caught on account that he supposedly has the capacity to foresee events and can turn into objects, animals and other phenomena in order to escape from being captured such that by the time the story ends Simbwindimbwi is still on the loose. In fact it is important to point out that in both hunts that had been mounted in the story, the object of the hunt is never captured: Mlozi had left the

area before the arrival of the pursuers just like Simbwindimbwi fled his hiding place in the Nyika Mountains before the party comprising police officers and some villagers could capture him. Since the hunt for the great Simbwindimbwi resembles and evokes that of the slave raider, Mlozi and the two events are public political acts central to the plot of the narrative and key to nation formation and sustenance, this adds credence to the suggestion that the novel is about the nation. At the level of allegorical interpretation, Mlozi and Simbwindimbwi's supposed invincibility points to destructive elements of the Malawi nation rooted in tribal and colonial forms of social organization that always seem to have potency. The futility of the hunts to capture Simbwindimbwi may represent failure by the modern nation to completely overcome certain deeply rooted but undesirable traditional elements. Suffice to say that the failure is used to assert that elements of traditional culture will always be present among the local people making up the nation. Since methods of identifying witches are being altered in recognition of respect for human rights and dignity, Kayira might be sensing social change towards universalism.

As far as a nation is concerned, the most significant myth has always been the myth of common descent where people constituting a particular nation view themselves as one large family of genetically related human beings through their blood ties to the chief or king. In constructing Malawi as a nation, one way of instilling a feeling of common nationality by its architect who happens to be the first president Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda was by creating a myth of common descent among various tribes that are scattered over the three regions of the country (Mphande, 1996). Even in the case of a multi-ethnic nation, there is always an assumed centre that acts as a manifestation of the myth of common descent (Louissi and Grosby, 2007:5). Similarly, in *The Looming Shadow*, Kayira has constructed a society where the people have the same roots with the only difference being the white District Commissioner and white police officers at the district headquarters where the chief and some

of his subjects are taken to following their arrest. What is more, the nature and experiences of the tribe as a symbol of common descent are presented as the root cause of the country's desirable and undesirable national characteristics. Traditionally, all Malawians are assumed to belong to one village or another and are therefore subject to the rule of traditional chiefs. In some cases, there are village headmen and women, then higher chiefs all the way to paramount chiefs all of whom play a role in settling disputes with the help of councils of elders. By refusing to recognize witchcraft as a social phenomenon, the nation-state is in sharp conflict with people's cultural values and beliefs. Again, although there is constant reminder that it is 'unMalawian' for a chief to behave in violent manner or to be arrested these acts have not escaped Chief Yotamu Mwenimuzi. Hence Kayira's portrayal of these incidents may be construed as an act of questioning the assumed character of the nation.

Scholars have long acknowledged the importance of rituals in the process of nation construction. Jasper Dag Tjaden (2012), for example, asserts that national narratives use mass public rituals, performances and selective memory to reinvigorate collective identity. In Tjaden's view, a ritual is basically performed in order to re-enact a certain memory and it usually has a direct or indirect political message about the nation associated with ethnic nationalism. This thinking is reflected in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where, as Abdelkader Babker (2016) concludes, the people perform various rituals such as the burial rituals for their departed relatives and others to define and reinforce their pre-colonial Igbo nation. It is for the same purpose that the modern Chile nation holds public celebrations to commemorate their independence from colonialism which also marked the birth of the modern Chile nation-state (Tjiden, 2012). But rituals can sometimes have the opposite consequence to that of construction of the nation as a psychological phenomenon as it can also be used as a tool for contesting the history, identity or character of the modern nation. Amongst the rituals performed in *The Looming Shadow* is the witch-identifying ritual

(mwavi) associated with the Chewa ethnic group as already mentioned. Chief Yotamu Mwenimuzi is compelled to perform this highly symbolic ritual in order to find out if indeed Mushani has bewitched Matenda. The ritual is performed in line with tradition according to the chief who, before he begins reiterates that the ritual they are about to perform as a community was done repeatedly by their forefathers whenever they were faced with a similar situation (p.110). But the way Kayira has used this ritual serves a number of political or rhetorical purposes. Firstly, the witch-identifying ritual is a symbolic act of asserting the ethnic origins of the Malawi nation. By performing this ritual, the people are identifying themselves with the old entity from which the modern Malawi nation originated. This act of re-identification with the past is essential in re-asserting the group's national identity and constructing the modern nation in the present. This is so because people consider themselves as belonging to a particular nation by establishing their connection with the forefathers. By so doing, the people constituting a nation regard themselves as descendants of the ancestors who not only occupied a particular territory but also performed particular rituals since the nation lives in the past, the present and the future.

Secondly Kayira is using the re-enactment of this ritual to expose the violent masculinist character of the nation which has been inherited from its ethnic past. The modernized form of the ritual has remained a symbol of violence due to the inherent brutality of the witch-hunting ritual that is refusing to disappear. This violence is administered on two innocent birds, the doves which are believed to represent the accuser and the accused respectively. Therefore even in its modernized form, the ritual still unleashes violence on innocent creatures. The narrator reports that taking due cognizance of the fact that times have changed, the chief has decided to modernize the ritual somewhat as follows:

> He decides to use doves to which the mwavi poison is administered instead of the actual human beings, and he starts administering the mwavi poison to the accuser (the

dove representing Simbwindimbwi) instead of the one representing the accused, Mushani (p.110-112).

The modernization reported above has some political interpretations in the sense that by blending tradition and modernity in the witch-identifying ritual, Mwenimuzi is engaged in what Kleinen (1999) calls "cultural neo-traditionalism" which is part of the renegotiation of authoritarianism in the pre- and postcolonial eras, not its abandonment (p.193). Furthermore, considering that the colonial government has banned the witch-identifying ritual in all its forms country-wide, its mere performance is highly subversive as it is meant to reinvigorate a collective and enduring identity which is at odds with the modern Malawi nation but which modernity is actively trying to diminish. The fact that modernity is actively trying to transform the traditional society is reflected in the chief's statement that goes:

> "I realize, of course that our present government, which neither understands nor appreciates our great tradition, has made it a crime to administer the mwavi to suspected people, but when the security and happiness of my people is threatened, am willing to override the government's ruling and that is just what I am going to do this afternoon" (p. 110).

The above quotation may be interpreted as signifying that there is great yearning for re-enactment of the old memories as a way of reconnecting with the past or the 'real' self which is being prohibited by the modern nation-state such that the modern nation can only be constructed as an entity which people negotiate between what they were in the past and what they can be in the present. The past, according to the village chief, is necessary for a sense of 'the self' and nation in the present but modernity with which the postcolonial Malawian nation has aligned itself works in opposition to this fact hence continues to commit violence on the people. The compromise that the chief comes up with is therefore done as a marker of

the desired nation formation characterized by hybridity. In the local people's minds the compromise is an admission of the impracticality of the primordial Malawian spirit. Although the ritual is an old one, its revival and the manner in which chief Yotamu Mwenimuzi revives it shows that traditional rituals are not anti-modern but are significant in the life of modern nations which are always in the process of becoming and defining themselves. Tradition appears to be rejected whenever it appears in its raw form with the resultant outcome being the character of the nation that is in line with universal values and international norms.

Putting *The Looming Shadow* in its historical context, I note that the Malawi constitution, which has maintained the colonial-era laws on sorcery, does not recognize the existence of witchcraft although it is believed to be widely practiced in that country. According to Mponda (2011), the laws of Malawi make it illegal to accuse anyone of being a witch or to claim that one practices witchcraft. Mponda observes that this has created a situation where witchcraft is both widespread and impassioned but not acknowledged by the law of the land. He goes further to show that some witches and wizards have come in the open. Gilbert Kachilika, for example, is reported to have confessed publicly in a court appearance to being a wizard as follows: "I am a wizard and I teach others the practice [of witchcraft]. I am free to hold the belief that I practice and have powers to practice witchcraft. It would be against the liberty of an individual to compel him or her not to believe what they believe to be what they are" (quoted in *Mail & Guardian*, 5th June 2011).

Apart from the violent character of the nation, the witch-identifying ritual also exposes the problem of lack of national unity as it highlights the fissures that exist in the society. Some characters have sided with the chief who doubts the existence of witchcraft while others are siding with Simbwindimbwi who is fully convinced that Mushani is a witch responsible for Matenda's sickness. Besides, all the major pillars on which nationhood rests such as religion, the law and culture are dividing the people instead of uniting them. The divisions that are

witnessed during the ‘mwavi’ drinking ritual point to the systemic differences that exist in the wider community called the nation. Religion in form of Christianity, for example, divides the people into believers and non-believers in a society where some people such as Simbwindimbwi seem to be believers in the power of the spirits of their ancestors while others represented by the character, Simeon are not. Similarly administration of justice by law enforcing agents too divides the people of Kavukuku Village and so is the traditional culture of inheriting the throne when the one holding it goes away.

As a matter of fact, the whole story of *The Looming Shadow* is constructed on the principle of irony for instead of the chief being the custodian of tradition he is the one in the forefront promoting modernity with his views about reality which he believes to be observable rather than based on fantasy and mere belief. The chief also engages in a heated exchange and physical fight with his subject, the witchdoctor, Simbwindimbwi whom he drives out of the village instead of being accommodating. Through that incident, the assumed unity which is a hallmark of any nation is put to question. Through such acts, Kayira is questioning the oneness of the people constituting the Malawi nation. Kayira highlights the problem of lack of unity in the nation by showing, on the literal level that the disagreements experienced in the village are internal. On the level of allegory, the absence of oneness which is witnessed in the village points to the absence of oneness at the level of nation. The incident in which the village chief, the very embodiment of the nation, expels his subject from the village is an act of rejection of some of the members of the nation whom Simbwindimbwi represents.

Similarly, the religious activities of Simeon are welcome to some but are loathed by others including the chief who at some point orders him to suspend his preaching which he viewed irritating. The chief shouted, “No more of this preaching, Simeon” (p.86). Simeon has been presented as a fool not to be taken seriously throughout the story. Surprisingly he is appearing to be the most sensible person during the physical conflict between the chief and

Simbwindimbwi. This use of irony is deliberate on the part of the author to underscore the fact that what we are witnessing is the case of a nation fighting itself. Through irony, Kayira is trying to say that what we think is a nation is actually a highly divided society. Using the scenario involving the chief and Simbwindimbwi, the nation is presented as in opposition to what it stands for and to things which have served its citizens well throughout the society's history. This is so because the chief questions Simbwindimbwi's methods and integrity as a witchdoctor by insisting that he presents empirical evidence to support his claim that Mushani has indeed bewitched Matenda. This is so in spite of the fact that Simbwindimbwi had reportedly served the current chief's father with distinction, and had even cured the current chief as a young boy when he had been 'bewitched'. These divisive acts go against the idea that the Malawi nation is a historically unified group of people who had settled in the Nyasaland territory since the text portrays it as a kind of nation in which there are a lot of internal conflicts, contradictions and disunity. Kayira is also showing that the actions of the village chief and his competitor, the witchdoctor Simbwindimbwi are motivated by a need to be hero-worshipped which points to the character of the Malawi nation as a nation of hero-worshippers.

In the novel, the Malawi nation has also been represented as a paternalistic entity in which male power dominates in all aspects of social life as the entire story seems to centre on men, their jealousies and needs. The text portrays women as both objectified and insignificant in the eyes of men. For example Matenda wanted to marry two sisters of the same family by using force. There are also glaring signs that Kayira has featured a society in which he would like to expose that women are not taken seriously. This manifests when the unnamed wife to the chief (only referred to as the queen) takes over the reins of power following her husband's arrest, but nobody wants to take her seriously. Besides, the queen is supposed to keep out of sight whenever her husband, the village-chief is holding serious discussions with people who

have come to brief or consult him on important matters simply because she is a woman. This is a sign that women are regarded as less wise and emotionally unstable in this society. The masculinist character of the nation also manifests in the violent nature of all the main characters such as the chief, Simbwindimbwi, Mushani and Matenda. The chief drives Simbwindimbwi out of the village using force and on his part Simbwindimbwi is not a man to play with for he has the capacity to cast magic spells on people if provoked. As regards the other two they have fought physically on several occasions. Although the other character, Mlozi is not a contemporary of Simbwindimbwi they are both mysterious male figures who are feared in society, the former as a slave hunter and the latter as someone who has the capacity to bewitch anyone if he so wished; their actions are violent and masculinist. Even Kavukuku Village has been presented as a masculine entity that has historically perpetrated violence on assumed practitioners of witchcraft and the people who have disagreed with the chief on matters of principle or cultural prescriptions. All the main characters (which are all male) are paternalistic figures whose actions are central to the plot of the narrative and to the national character where the country comes out as wearing 'the big man' image, that of an aggressive black man which all the male characters featured in the story represent.

The masculinist character of the nation is also echoed in the myth of the morning and evening star. In the local Malawian mythology, the sun (star) is considered male while the moon is female. That is why the moon is associated with women sexuality such as menstruation cycles which are often expressed in relation to the moon (Schoffeleers & Roscoe, 1987). Of the two sexes reflected in the myth, the chief focuses his message on the masculine gender hence highlights the ills of masculinity in society. According to this myth, the evening star is very selfish as it does not feed the moon. That is why the new moon is always thin when it comes out. In contrast, the morning star is very generous: It feeds the moon every day thereby making it fat. The chief urges children in his village not to be like the evening star but to

emulate the good character of the morning star although one boy argues that the two stars are one and the same thing (p.88). According to the village chief, this night in which the myth is narrated resembles the night when the village was ransacked. On that fateful night, which took place many years previously, his village was ambushed by colonial forces and all the boys and men were forcibly taken to help in the hunt for the legendary Mlozi, the slave trader when the chief was still a young boy. This implies that the present circumstances marked by oppression and violence mirror the old times when the village was ill-treated by forces acting in the interest of a foreign power that was masculinist in character. The connection between the two stories lies in their significance to the birth and character of the Malawi nation. The myth of the morning and evening star features nurturing which is central to the survival of the nation but which is lacking at the time the chief is narrating the myth. The author's choice and his act of linking the myth to the suffering perpetrated in the territory by Mlozi are significant to highlighting the masculinist character of the nation which on the national flag is depicted as the rising star (the sun).

4.4 Mocking and Resisting Masculinist Acts as a Means for Challenging the Country's Nationhood

So far my analysis has dealt with one part of the text which constructs the country's national character derived from the traditional entitities such as the Chewa tribe from which Malawi draws its name. However there are other discourses in the same texts which not only challenge that presumed dominant national character but also try to construct a totally new one associated with internationality.

While the Malawi nation displays masculinist characteristics, that image is far from settled because a nation is by its very nature a site of continuous struggles and contestations (Gellner, 1983; Hutchinson, 2005). As Ogude (1999) similarly observes, when African writers narrate their nations, they set a dialogue between the former colonizer's world of

ideas and the writers' other zones of knowledge. "[T]he end result is that African novels incorporate dialogic and contradictory elements of the nation often seen in characters being caught between ancient and modern (postcolonial) modes of life created in the very characters' minds" (Ogude 1999:6). In this regard, we see how irrelevant western religion is in local people's day-to-day lives despite it being the pillar of postcolonial nation-state formation in much of Africa including Malawi. At the same time, although the Malawi nation has assumed masculinist characteristics, this national character is challenged in various ways that convey the author's postnationalist ideology as follows:

Matenda's intention to marry the two sisters is the root cause of suffering and disunity in the community. His desire to marry two girls who are blood sisters as his wives is driven by greed for power associated with the 'big man' syndrome and it leads to long standing hatred and open hostility between himself and Mushani. But the move is opposed by Nachele who is Matenda's target for polygamy. Nachele is depicted resisting Matenda's attempts to rape her and later the narrator reports that at the suggestion of Nachele, a group of leading men in the village conferred privately with Matenda and told him quite frankly that the young woman wished him to put an end to his clandestine behaviour of sexually harassing her in an effort to forcibly marry her. Although it is a typical masculinist mentality to blame the root cause of societal suffering on women, it must be acknowledged that the two women namely Nasama and Nachele refuse their respective husbands' moves to ferment hatred against each other by preaching peaceful coexistence between them. By and large, the novel devotes considerable attention to highlighting resistance to the masculinist character of the Malawi nation to suggest an alternative form of nationhood in which women are respected and treated as of equal in importance to men.

There is also a sub-theme about the competence of women that has been used to challenge the masculinist character of the Malawi nation. For instance, the old woman (the soothsayer) at

the end of the story who leads the police officers to where Simbwindimbwi is hiding is presented as a foil to Simbwindimbwi and indeed is much more effective than he is in spite of the fact that he is the most renowned witchdoctor in the land. His efforts in trying to cure Matenda's sickness which is attributed to acts of witchcraft end in failure and so are his methods and diagnoses which are depicted as lacking authenticity. In addition, in spite of efforts to undermine the chief's wife following her husband's arrest, she has literally taken over the reins of power as the caretaker ruler of the village. She is said to have declared herself ruler of the village in the absence of her husband in this highly patriarchal society and is proving to be a more effective and determined leader than her husband. At least, she is not as timid as her husband is in dealing with the state power (the police) and is more pragmatic (her husband was rather theoretical or philosophical) hence a better leader than him. For example, she confronts the police and ordered them to pay the old woman (the soothsayer) first before hiring her services and forbade them from arresting people in her village as a way of forcing them into submission to participate in the hunt for Simbwindimbwi (p.150-151). Through such portrayals, Legson Kayira is presenting a quiet critique of the masculinist nation as it has been constructed through the colonial experience and after the attainment of independence. By satirizing embodiments of the masculinist nation such as Simbwindimbwi, the village chief and police officers, Kayira is condemning such a nation and signals the existence of a move towards a postnation in which people are judged by their capabilities and in which equity and fairness rule supreme.

In this text, internationality is further signaled through Kayira's act of showing western ideals in good light while being critical of the traditional African values and practices through satire. In a crisis such as when Kavuku Village is in a state of chaos, the state power created by white colonialists comes in and brings order amidst the engulfing disorder. This manifests several times. One such occasion is during the aftermath of the arson incident when the

police, a western born institution, comes in and makes arrests to calm the situation. Another incident is the West's efforts to end slave trade in the territory by hunting down Mlozi, the chief Arab slave raider in the territory. On their own, the natives seem disorganized, powerless and incapable of administering proper justice when they wrong one another. The violence these people perpertrate against one another are largely based on false accusations, petty jealousies and incomprehensible traditional cultural beliefs. A good example is the accusation of witchcraft leveled against Mushani which Kayira portrays as unfounded if not utterly false. It has taken the colonial power to outlaw such unjust laws such as those surrounding witchcraft among the natives which promote the killing of otherwise innocent people. The western ideals which colonialism promotes mirror universal values founded on principles of fair trial, respect for human rights and dignity. Therefore, through these incidents, Kayira is undoubtedly edging the character of the Malawi nation towards internationality.

4.5 Conclusion

In summary, the chapter has focused on how Legson Kayira has used some of the Chewa myths, rituals and certain symbols in *The Looming Shadow* to both construct and critique the character of the postcolonial Malawi nation. In this chapter, I have highlighted how, in his construction of the character of the nation, the author has relied on symbolism such as the Nyika Plateau to talk about the Malawi nation. In the same vein he has used allegory such as the portrayal of Kavukuku Village as 'the nation writ small' in such a way that its experiences represent those of the nation. The chapter has shown that in constructing the masculinist character of the postcolonial Malawi nation, the violent acts of the village chief, and those of the medicineman, Simbwindimbwi and the brutal force perpetrated by the state power are key indicators of the violent character of the Malawi nation. In Kayira's politics of narrating the nation he has demonstrated that the current character of Malawi as a violent,

oppressive, divided nation full of petty jealousies and rampant witchcraft which are carried overs from the primordial entities particularly the ancient Maravi (Chewa) kingdom and the colonial state from which it emerged. These characteristics are reflected through myths and rituals related to the rural tribal Chewa people whom certain scholars have argued constitute the real Malawi nation. I have observed that there is an attempt on the part of the author to create a society in which the people have the same roots and are attempting to assert their ethnic culture that unfortunately inhabits violence, divisions and jealousy. On rituals, my main observation is that the author has mainly used them to reconnect the new generation of Malawians with the past generations as a way of asserting their Malawianness. Although cultural rituals are usually perceived as anti-modern, Kayira has modernized the witch-identifying ritual to suit the changing times and show that the postcolonial Malawi nation is a construct through the coming together of tradition and modernity. At the same time, rituals have been used to show that the character of the modern Malawi nation, that of condoning violence comes a long way and is deeply rooted in people's collective psyche. What is also striking in this text is the fact that Kayira has projected the emerging character of the nation based on universal values by providing a silent critique of the violent masculinist character of the Malawi nation through the actions of the female characters as a way of contesting the nation and shoring up his postnationalist ideology. The women such as Nafele, Nasama and the chief's wife are all resisting attempts by the dominant male power to control them and are even proving to be as good as men and even better at doing what is assumed to be men's privilege. This act of undermining the presumed paternalistic character of the nation is also demonstrated by the old soothsayer who is presented as a foil to 'the doctor', Simbwindimbwi the great. Through the incidents highlighted in this chapter, Kayira has both constructed and challenged the masculinist character of the Malawi nation by symbolically portraying it as an entity that is marred by internal contradictions, violence, conflicts and

disunity of the people constituting it such that it is slowly but surely replaced by one that promotes justice, equality and fairlness among all people.

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: Unmasking the Rhetoric of "Mother Malawi": Engaging Politics of the Gendered Representation of the Nation in *The Civil Servant*

O God bless our land of Malawi,

Keep it a land of peace,

Put down each and every enemy,

Hunger, disease, envy.

Join together all our hearts as one,

That we be free from fear.

Bless our leader, each and every one,

And Mother Malawi.

(The Malawi national anthem taken from *Hymns for Malawi* No. 376)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses how Legson Kayira has utilized the feminine representation of the Malawi nation as a mother in *The Civil Servant* to interrogate the issue of citizenship and expose the problem of patriotism and the suffering of the people in the society. The study details how Kayira engages the gendered image of the nation to highlight its implications thereby challenging the country's rhetoric as 'Mother Malawi'. There are strong indications that Kayira is questioning the dominant nativist construct of the Malawian nation that portrays the nation as a woman by exposing what that image might be concealing. This is done by following the various love stories which the novelist has framed which cut cross racial, class and national boundaries as a way of challenging the boundaries and histories that govern the country's image as a mother.

Before going further, it is important that I provide a synopsis of Legson Kayira's *The Civil Servant* as follows: The story of *The Civil Servant* is constructed by merging two parallel storylines one centring on Mr George Chipewa who is a senior clerk at a certain government department and another one focusing on Demero, his junior. The narrative oscillates between George Chipewa's and Demero's romantic escapades, and is almost entirely set in the urban area in an unnamed post-independent African country, a thinly disguised portrait for Malawi.

After losing both children through death before they reached the age of five, George Chipewa goes wayward and indulges in excessive beer drinking and womanizing around the town of Banya at the expense of his wife's happiness. The text reveals that a white doctor at the hospital told them that the wife, Vera would never have children anymore due to a damaged womb she had incurred during the second child birth. Vera is a South African born coloured who sacrificed her education, career and future to marry George Chipewa. The two never met in person prior to their marriage but exchanged numerous letters as pen pals before falling in love and eventually getting married. Vera left her country and everything behind to join George Chipewa in marriage. In the first chapter, it is reported that their marriage took place nine years ago.

Meanwhile, a newly employed clerk at George Chipewa's office by the name of Demero has sought temporary accommodation at the Chipewa's house. Demero has come to town leaving behind a fiancée at the village in the northern region whom his father arranged for him to marry in future while the girl was still young.

Due to mistreatment and loneliness, Mrs Vera Chipewa, who is currently in her early thirties, begins to seek Demero's company at home as Mr Chipewa intensifies his habit of coming back from work very late or sleeping out altogether. When Vera tries to confront him, he is always on the defensive and threatens that he is going to kick her out of the house and send

her back to her country. Sometimes he beats her for no apparent reason. The situation worsens after Mr Chipewa falls head over heels in love with a young rural but married woman named Isabella whose husband is away working in the mines in South Africa. Isabella and her little son, Ben stays outside the town of Banya in a house built for them by her husband. They are under the general care and authority of her parents-in-law, Mr Gideon and his wife, Natunga. Periodically, Mr Chipewa sneaks into Isabella's house at night to avoid being noticed and leaves the house before the break of dawn. His love affair with Isabella goes on for nearly six months during which time his wife's miseries intensify. At the end of the fourth month, Isabella discovers that she is pregnant and immediately informs Mr Chipewa who proposes that the two should elope and live together in the city, Banya as husband and wife. Isabella does not reveal her pregnancy to her parents-in-law but as weeks pass by, they start becoming suspicious. For that reason, they set up a trap to catch "the man who comes at night and sleeps with her". When Mr Chipewa visits Isabella again one evening as he has been doing, he is caught and severely beaten but luckily he escapes. The story has it that in an effort to set Mr Chipewa free from her brother-in-law's grip, Isabella presses a burning log in between her brother-in-law's legs. This move enables Mr Chipewa to escape.

In the meantime Demero has moved into his own house where he is visited by Mr Chipewa's wife a number of times but the young man fails to sleep with her much as he has strong feelings for her. Another person who visits Demero at his new house is Vivian, a white girl who works as a bank clerk. Eventually Demero and Vivian fall in love as Demero's disillusionment with the village girl whom his parents chose for him grows. The village girl, Enid, writes Demero several letters to which he feels no need to respond. Enid eventually realizes that Demero does not love her but Demero's father, in conjunction with Enid's father, are arranging to send Enid over to Demero to start a family. The death of Enid's mother leads to postponement of Enid's coming as she cannot be sent over when culturally

speaking she is still in the period of mourning. Although Enid is tradition's ideal woman, she has a physical handicap in the form of harelip which nobody wants to talk about. She is pretty aware of her physical handicap and correctly predicts that she is going to wait in vain. She expresses this pessimism in a letter to Demero which reads in part, "I am afraid that I am only living in a dream, that you will not marry me or if you do, you will regret it. I know that I am not beautiful … and not well educated. I am only a simple girl…" Such doubts in Enid's mind work to Demero's advantage as his love for Vivian intensifies leading to their engagement. Their plan is to get married as soon as possible, even before the white girl is introduced to Demero's parents at the village to ensure that their marriage is not blocked.

Following the violent drama at Isabella's house, the parents-in-law send Isabella back to her parents where she is ill-received especially by her father who denounces her infidelity, the resultant pregnancy and the man responsible for it. The situation worsens when a few weeks after Isabella's return to her parents, Gideon receives news that Jodi, Isabella's husband has passed away in a mine accident in South Africa. Almost everyone blames Jodi's death on Isabella because according to traditional beliefs, an unfaithful wife brings bad luck on her husband who is away on a dangerous mission such as hunting or mining. The renowned medicine man, Makaba is consulted by Jodi's family and he 'confirms' that Isabella's infidelity is indeed the root cause of Jodi's death as the act had angered the spirits of their ancestors. When this piece of information reaches Isabella's village, her father disowns her describing her as 'a killer of men'. This forces her to flee the village for Banya in search for Mr George Chipewa. She walks the whole day until nightfall and sleeps under a tree while crying. In the process, she catches a cold. Isabella is later discovered on the roadside by some passers-by and is brought to Banya Hospital unconscious. She does not regain full consciousness and has a miscarriage. Although in an unconscious state, her lips keep on mentioning Mr George Chipewa's name. Doctors telephone Mr George Chipewa who pays

Isabella several visits in hospital. Unfortunately, Isabella does not live to see Mr George Chipewa as she dies on her fourth day in hospital. Her death shatters Mr Chipewa to the point of being hospitalized for two weeks. His sickness is said to be mainly psychological as he has been planning to marry Isabella and look after her and the baby she was carrying in her womb. Those marriage plans had made Mr Chipewa conclude in his mind that he was divorcing his wife, Vera. With Isabella's death, things are no longer the same. The story ends as Demero accompanied by his fiancée, Vivian visits Mr George Chipewa in hospital. Demero announces his impending wedding with Vivian. On his part, Mr Chipewa has reconciled with his wife, Vera and announces that he has been discussing with her some plans to take her on holiday once he comes out of hospital and to adopt a young boy called Ben whose father and mother both passed away. Mr Chipewa does not disclose to anybody that the child they are planning to adopt is the late Isabella's son.

5.2 Imagining the Postcolonial Nation-state as a Gendered Entity: an Overview of Debates on Gender and the Nation

This novel features a highly melodramatic story full of villains and victims interspersed with manifesto-like statements on the plight of women which I consider to be representing the difficulties in defining certain aspects of Malawi's nationhood such as citizenship and exposing the problem of patriotism and the suffering of the people in the society. This is revealed by the genre of the novel, a comedy of manners characterised by satire. The novel focuses on the difficulties that different categories of women face in Malawi but it also highlights their agency. For example, Isabella's use of the burning log and her act of leaving both her husband's and father's village are cases in point. Kayira recognizes the cleavages within the nation but he raises these questions through comedy and satire.

The practice of imagining a nation as a gendered entity is a wide-spread phenomenon. Yuval-Davis (1997), for example, observes that gender relations are very relevant in people's theorizations of nations because constructions of nationhoods involve both manhood and womanhood. As a matter of fact, a nation is gendered in the sense that it draws on socially constructed ideas surrounding femininity and masculinity, she further argues. Within nation construction, Yuval-Davis is quick, however, to note that it is more common to imagine a nation as a woman than as a man because women are biological reproducers of the nation; they constitute the boundary markers of the nation judging by surveillance on their sexual and reproductive freedoms, hence they signify national difference and essence; they transmit the nation's culture to children or future generations that constitute the nation and they are symbols and participants of national struggles. The first point is particularly important and is corroborated by Ann Marie Adams (2001) where she similarly observes that women's roles as biological producers of national collectivities often renders them as guardians of cultural boundaries and symbolic markers of national difference. Therefore, in Yuval-Davis' (1997) sense as well as that of Marie Adams (2001), it is common for gender ideology to be at the centre of production of any nationalist thought arguing that it is women (and not the intelligentsia, artists or politicians as some modernist theorists such as Benedict Anderson have argued) who reproduce nations biologically, culturally and symbolically. A nation is imagined as a woman such as a mother, wife or sister whom men (the government, patriarchy and other bodies or institutions) must protect to safeguard their honour and all the life-giving and nurturing attributes associated with them. According to Banerjee (2003), the woman is likened to land and one's motherland is often invested with the same kind of erotic attraction men feel towards women, the feeling to possess it, admire it, love it, protect it and die fighting for it. In this regard, Banerjee (2003) notes that the French national anthem implicitly calls upon the country's soldiers to protect the French nation embodied by the young,

beautiful woman, Marianne. The passion people have towards protecting their mothers and sisters is the same level of passion that they often have towards their nations (Saigol, 2000). To Yuval-Davis (1997) again, national conflicts usually play out on women's bodies and so are the developmental milestones and historical collective experiences which are narrated using the symbolism of women's bodies although women are often excluded from the public sphere and hence from political and national discourse. For Partha Chatterjee (1993: 131), in Indian nationalist discourse "a woman becomes a convenient symbol of the nation due to her spiritual qualities such as self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion and religiosity which constitute the dominant characteristic of femininity". However, some scholars view the image of the mother of the nation as a masculinist construction and argue that the relation of women to nationalism is problematic if women's status as subjects and objects of signification is considered particularly when the glorification of the mother as a symbolic representation of the nation does not match their actual experiences since such representations essentially serve the purpose of taking away their real power (Jolly, 1994). My interest is in what such a construction masks in the case of Malawi and how the author has utilized the woman symbol to interrogate certain issues to do with the country's nationhood such as citizenship and patriotism.

In postcolonial discourse, the settler nation was initially imagined as a woman since it was the bearer of a foreign burden and not the maker of its own meaning, implying that it was not quite an independent subject since its status as a subdued (colonized) entity by the "more powerful, masculine and skilled" western nation cast it to the level of femininity. As Banerjee (2003:170) notes, these relations were reproduced between settler regimes and the people they colonized. He writes, "[c]olonialism constructed the colonized nations as feminine and the colonizing nation as masculine through the depiction of the European masculine hero who would conquer and create order out of the feminized chaos of the colonized territories such as

Africa and India" (p.170). After independence, most formerly colonized nations, particularly in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean have continued imagining themselves as a woman. Through their national anthems, they depict their nations as women's bodies in perpetual danger of being defiled by the enemies and calling upon their soldiers to defend the women's frontiers and their honour. However, there are certain nations which are imagined as fatherlands in the world. Suffice to say that although Yuval-Davis has concentrated on highlighting nation imagination in feminist terms, there are instances where the nation is imagined as a man, often a father. Zimbabwe, for example, is imagined as fatherland and at times as motherland. As Jolly (1994) rightly observes, fatherlands are as common as motherlands. Since a nation is symbolized either as a mother or father (man or woman), it is gendered in one way or the other.

In Malawi, the image of the nation as a mother ("Mother Malawi") is rooted in the traditional Chewa practices associated with matrilineal culture that preceded colonialism and nationalist movements of the modernist kind. As already alluded to elsewhere, the bone of contention in Malawi's national imagination and its meaning rests in the fact that the dominant ethinic group, the Chewa (Maravi) imagines the nation in feminine terms since the Chewa people are matrilineal in their orientation and have ascribed this image onto the entire nation as reflected in the national anthem. According to Mphande (1996), Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the first president, imposed his Chewa imagination of the nation onto the rest of the country in which he was supposed to be regarded as the "Nkhoswe Number One" [great uncle] to all the womenfolk in the country. Among the Chewa, the uncle is the pillar and basically overseer of all his sisters and his sisters' children. But almost all tribes in the northern region are patrilineal and so they do not share Banda's characterization of the nation along matrilineal lines thereby making national imagination and building problematic. Opposition to the feminization of the nation was reflected even during Banda's rule in the songs composed by

dance groups from the northern region who portrayed Malawi as a patrilineal society (Chirwa, 2001). The fact that the composer of the nationalist song, the Malawi national anthem captured above represented the nation as a woman ("Mother Malawi") is not surprising because as I have already highlighted, a large section of the Malawian society is matrilineal culturally speaking with the figure of the woman as the mother of the nation very pronounced. With Chewa nationalism, Malawi is not just a modern nation but fundamentally a traditional Chewa nation characterized by matrilineal values and ideals.

According to historical sources such as the writings of Langworthy (1972), the image of a woman as "Mother of the Nation" or the nation itself was prominent even in pre-colonial Malawi where Makewana (mother of the nation/children/all the people) held a very important position throughout the historical Maravi Kingdom from which Malawi draws its name. This shows that the act of imagining the nation as a woman using the idea of 'great maternal power' has always played out in the Chewa national imagination of their society.

5.3 The Image of the Nation as "Mother Malawi" in *The Civil Servant*

In exploring Kayira's politics of narrating the Malawi nation through the image of woman, the following key questions come to mind: How is the mother image of the nation constructed in the text? What aspects of womanhood does Kayira use to construct the image of the nation and how does he connect those aspects of womanhood to questions of nationhood such as citizenship, patriotism and the suffering of the people in the society? Here I explore the iconographic role women play in the representation of Malawi's nationhood such as citizenship and patriotism and the suffering of the nation. Finally, what does Kayira do with the image of woman of the nation for it to constitute a politics? In other words, how does Kayira appropriate the rhetoric of "Mother Malawi" and the symbolization of that rhetoric in his narration of the nation? I will draw evidence from both content and form of the novel, *The Civil Servant*.

According to Jolly (1994), women's apparent capacity for self-sacrificing, suffering, their purity and potential for chastity are the qualities precisely needed for them to serve as icons for the nation. Hence when it comes to the politics of narrating the nation, the writer may choose any of those features to critique and represent the nation. Since an ideal woman is a model of an ideal society and women are carriers of the country's honour, it is often the revered, pure, self-sacrificing mother, sister or fiancée that is deployed as a figure of the nation (Mookherjee, 2008: 45). Although the image of a traditionally revered figure of a docile, tortured, good mother kind is commonly used, elsewhere authors have also employed the image of a combative mother, someone who provides new hopes and inspirations to represent the national dream. They have sometimes employed the image of a corrupt woman or that of a bad mother to disrupt the dominant imaginings of the nation or contest it assumed character and history. In this connection, Bernstein (2008) observes that Salman Rashdie has done exactly that in *The Moor's Last Sigh* where he insinuates the possibility of incest between Mother India and her citizen sons as a way of challenging the dominant imagination of that nation. Bernstein goes on to say that there are instances where monster, absent, deviant and non-maternal mothers are used to reveal the precariousness of the nation and national identity. Usually when the author turns against portraying the state as protecting, caring for and defending the woman who happens to be the figure of the nation, and instead represents the woman as victimised, abused, neglected and exploited, his or her politics of narration becomes apparent. And as Saigol (2000) further observes, for a woman to function as a symbol of the nation, her sexuality, physical body or personal circumstances are used as there is often a desire by nations to assert collective identity through violent appropriation of women. Authors can therefore feature the barren, the fertile, the promiscuous, the chaste and the suffering mother in their politics of narrating the nation depending upon the idea about the nation which they want to put across. In Iran, the simple icon of a veiled woman has been

turned into a national symbol and is often used by nationalists and novelists alike in narrating that nation (Yuval-Davis & Mathias, 1989). Sometimes a nation such as Lebanon or a city such as Beirut can be represented as female as is the case with Zahra whose body the author, Hanan al Shaykh uses in his nationalist rhetoric. Hanan al Shaykh has used the scars on Zahra's body to represent emotional scars of the nation, Lebanon which has been at war with Israel several times in the past. Symbolically speaking, the protagonist, Zahra, is the ultimate battleground on which the war between Israel and Lebanon is fought.

My first task in this section is to justify the fact that the story of *The Civil Servant* is about the nation by looking at the depiction of female characters especially by interrogating how Kayira works with those features which usually make women serve as symbols of the nation such as their status as biological reproducers of the nation, their spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice and devotion, and their connection to nature. Through the experiences of female characters Kayira explores the suffering of the Malawians at the hands of patriarchy, postcoloniality and the state power. What is more, Kayira has used women experiences to confront the rhetoric of 'mother Malawi' by exposing how it masks problems of citizenship and the suffering of the female characters at the hands of both patriarchy and the state power which represents the suffering of the people.

As Fredrick Jameson (1986) argues, " [n]arratives from the third world often contain within them a national allegory in such a way that even the private realm of the libidinal is a metaphor for the public" (p. 69). In line with Jameson's observation above, the story of *The Civil Servant* focuses on the realm of the libidinal in which the role of the woman as the reproducer of the nation is central to its plot. Vera Chipewa, one of the main characters is having a troubled marriage life because the children she gave birth to both died before reaching the age of five and she had her womb removed. The other main female character, Isabella too is a sad individual due to her sexuality since her second pregnancy complicates

her situation as a married woman leading to her untimely death. By focusing the story on the plight of a woman as a mother, the story has put the gender ideology at the centre of the production of Kayira's nationalist thought. In highlighting the relations between men and women in *The Civil Servant*, this section does not, however, seek to understand the construction of femininity per se but how Kayira has exploited that relationship to articulate his thinking on Malawi's citizenship questions, patriotism and endless suffering which the "Mother Malawi" rhetoric masks.

As Chatterjee (1993) and Jolly (1994) argue separately, women tend to symbolize the nation due to their spiritual qualities such as self-sacrifice, devotion, and chastity. Interestingly, these qualities seem to have been displayed by all the female characters in the text. Primarily, these qualities are witnessed in Vera Chipewa whose character resonates with Lisa Berstein's (2008) concept of authentic motherhood as an aspect of womanhood and has linked it to the suffering of the nation. Vera is portrayed as a 'natural' mother. Beside her never-ending grief for her dead children, the kind of care that Vera gives Demero throughout the text is that of a mother to her child. Highlighting the importance of point of view, both Demero and the narrator describe the two dead children as Vera's children thereby completely excluding George Chipewa from parenthood politics (p.115). Commenting on Vera's miseries, Demero opines that perhaps if her children were still alive, Vera (being an authentic mother) would have been happier than she now is. Besides, Vera is lonely and psychologically affected as her husband, the senior civil servant, spends most of his nights with concubines and treats her harshly but she perseveres and does not give in to pressure from other men to sleep with her or that from her female friends to quit her marriage. Throughout the story, Vera is very concerned with the young man's welfare both at her house and even after Demero moves into his own house in another location like a real mother would do. It is unfortunate that Demero cannot appreciate Vera's motherly gestures as he continues to pursue his erotic desires for

her. Vera stands firm against Demero's attempts at seducing her at his house as the young man deliberately puts on romantic music and dances with her while holding her tightly in his arms.

> "They danced for thirty minutes in total silence, as though they were dumb. Now they swayed to and fro and now they turned around lazily, but all the time paying little or no attention to the music itself even though some of the pieces were among the most popular tunes of the day. Now their cheeks were pressed against each other and Demero even ventured to touch the lobe of her ear with his tongue and he became even more excited when he realised that she did not repulse him. She merely pressed both her hands against his chest, as if defending her breasts, and he felt a feeble push. …. Slowly he put his hands around her, drew her closer to him so that her breasts were firmly pressed against his chest and his throbbing heart. She still remained calm and seemed utterly lost in a maze of thoughts" (p.113).

The fact that Vera has resisted Demero's attempts to sleep with her shows that she is an authentic wife who is always committed to her husband. Her commitment further manifests in the fact that she "tolerates" her husband's promiscuity and harsh treatment both of which she returns with love instead. This has prompted people in society to take her extraordinary nature not as a sign of love but stupidity as one character Bingo reports:

> "If Vera wasn't stupid, she would have left him long ago. Any reasonable woman wouldn't be married to that madman for longer than a day. But that South African idiot won't leave him for anything …He never conceals the fact that he is always being unfaithful to her… He boasts about it. Yet she won't leave him ….She is more educated than him. In fact she would have gone to the university if he hadn't persuaded her to marry him" (p.152).

The same level of cruelty that is experienced by Vera is also experienced by Enid who is going through mental anguish for although her and Demero (the junior civil servant) are officially engaged, Demero does not love her neither does he want to see her. Nevertheless she displays a high level of stoicism. In fact, Demero himself concludes that he has been cruel to his fiancée (p.32). Cruelty is accentuated by the motif of abandonment of women in the text since beside Vera and Enid being abandoned I also note that another female character, Monica Mpazi, is a victim of being dumped by men. No wonder Monica is pitied and is constantly referred to as the "old maid" in the story (p.148). On her part, Isabella is literally disowned by her father (the former army combatant), and by implication, her family following her pregnancy out of wedlock. Kayira has purposefully focused his narrative on the private realm of love and the home to which women belong or are traditionally confined as mothers of the nation to further back up my claim that he is narrating the nation through women's experiences. I argue that Malawi is represented as a suffering female figure whereby the woman is an icon of an enduring nation which is suffering at the hands of patriarchy and government institutions or their representatives. Much as Isabella is an adult, she is still under the control of her parents-in-law and her own biological parents. Although she gets money from her husband who is working in the mines in South Africa, she cannot spend that money the way she likes. Each time she is in need of something, she is expected to inform her parents-in-law who keep the money on her behalf and assess her requests before buying the commodities and delivering them to her (p. 63). In this case, the good woman image is an aspect which the Malawian society uses to oppress and exploit women. Enid is in a similar predicament as she cannot determine what to do with her life and when to marry Demero (p.139). Enid puts on a good woman image for she easily accepts her predicament when her fiancé leaves her for another lady (the white lady). She is not as bitter as we would expect her to be in most cases. If anything, she suffers in silence like most traditional or

"good" African women do. For both Isabella and Enid, the element of womanhood or femininity that has been used is that of the good woman archetype.

Circumstances surrounding Isabella's conduct do not take away the good wife image from her. The narrative voice highlights the fact that Isabella has been seduced by the master manipulator, Mr George Chipewa who counts her as the fortieth woman with whom he has slept. All the women Mr George Chipewa has slept with are said to be his victims. I see Kayira as constructing the "motherland" through gendered tropes of exploitation and control thereby representing both women and the ordinary person in the country as a victim of historical experiences of colonization, patriarchy and the post-independence rule of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Hence *The Civil Servant* is not just a mere love story but one that depicts the realities in the Malawian nation-state as it emerges out of colonial domination in the first decade after independence. It is a nationalist novel which the woman to mirror the whole situation of the post-independence Malawi of 1970s when it was written. This is done through its depiction of the aggressive nature of male characters as it impacts on womenfolk, and the suffering and stoicism of female characters at the hands of patriarchy and the nation-state which is represented by male characters such as George Chipewa and Demero both of whom are representatives of the government as clerks.

As Mookherjee (2008) has argued, the rhetoric and imagery of motherland can be used to articulate the gendered symbolization of the nation in such a way that the rape of women during war could represent the rape of the nation. This being the case, my reading of *The Civil Servant* is in such a way that the experiences of female characters at the hands of male characters are symbolic representations of the experiences of 'Mother Malawi' (the nation). In my reading, certain atrocities and political acts that affect the nation are inscribed on women's bodies and that their experiences are acting as national allegories. Enid's physical disability in form of a harelip which no one wants to talk about, for example, is indicative of

the nation's endemic suffering at the hands of patriarchy. I take it, as Hubinette (2005) and other scholars advise, that when a nation is imagined as a woman, it is the duty of male power, often represented by the government, the military or other bodies to rescue and defend women, to uphold their purity and sanctity. Failure to do so may represent the novelist's politics of questioning the status of the particular polity as a nation. As such, Demero's unwillingness to take her fiancée to a white doctor to operate on her to sort out the harelip problem may be indicative of the failures of the nation in the eyes of the author, Legson Kayira, hence highly political. And again, since the state as male power is essentially supposed to protect and care for the woman as a nation its unwillingness to treat Enid for her physical handicap in spite of having the means of doing so and in spite of preliminary consultations showing that the harelip could medically be sorted out is indicative of lack of care for its citizens by the nation-state. Kayira's *The Civil Servant,* therefore, adopts the same techniques as other literary works in Malawi which were published during Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship, that of cryptic writing in which the message which these texts were actually trying to put across was usually hidden. In Kayira's *The Civil Servant*, the author prominently features the suffering of the woman to represent the suffering of the nation since women in the text are experiencing cruelty from their husbands, fiancés and male parents as government representatives. Women are suffering both economically and socially which represents the economic and social challenges facing the nation. Economically speaking, Vera, Isabella and all the other female characters live in a state of deprivation or abject poverty and their condition is caused by lack of care from the menfolk whose responsibility they are.

But there are efforts to challenge the idea that Malawians will remain exploited and oppressed forever through women's agency. For example, although men have traditionally taken advantage of women and exploited and oppressed them, Kayira has included the

devilish and manipulative character of Pauline who happens to be Demero's office mate as a tool for challenging the exploitative nature of the nation. Pauline's act of tricking Demero into paying the bills at an expensive restaurant and bar, and getting him drunk for the very first time in his life is Kayira's attempt at challenging patriarchal nationalism as a collection of attitudes and structure of social organization which oppress women. The same agency is demontrated by Isabella who presses a burning log in between her brother-in-law's legs to give her lover, George Chipewa an opportunity to disentangle himself from the other man's grip and run away during a physical fight between the two men. Vera also resists Demero's efforts to seduce and sleep with her. Such use of women's agency may be construed as Kayira's way of rejecting the dominant image of Malawi as a docile, obedient and unsophisticated society which the "Mother Malawi" rhetoric of the national anthem evokes.

Use of women as a symbol of the nation has also been acknowledged by Sherry Ortner (1974) and Grant (1991) who have argued separately that women symbolically represent the nation because they are closely identified with nature while men often do not because they are identified with culture. Ortner (1974), in particular, has gone on to state that "by bearing children, women create new things naturally while men are forced to create theirs culturally" (p.74). This tendency to identify women with nature as a marker of symbolization of the nation ties up with those schools of thought which regard a nation as a natural phenomenon defined by extended kinship ties and characterized by ties between the collectivity and the land which the group is occupying. In *The Civil Servant*, there are systemic efforts on the part of the author to link women to nature as a way of justifying that their experiences represent the experiences of the nation. For instance, it is the heavy rain which drives George Chipewa into Isabella's house in the first place *(*p.170). On this particular trip to the rural areas, it only starts raining heavily as George Chipewa is approaching Isabella's house such that he is forced to seek shelter there. Isabella is portrayed as the welcoming land while George

Chipewa is the seed that badly needs the rain for it to germinate. In this case, Mr Chipewa's entry into Isabella's house brings forth life in form of the unborn baby but it also brings destruction since this heavy rain does not only introduce George Chipewa into Isabella's life but also brings great disturbances in her life and family leading to her illegitimate pregnancy, loss of marriage and untimely death. Since the text is using women's experiences to highlight the plight of the nation, it is befitting to use disturbances in nature that have forced Mr Chipewa to seek shelter to symbolize the suffering and exploitation of the people constituting the nation. Besides, Isabella dies due to coldness and stress both of which are elements of nature and she dies in the course of a miscarriage, another natural phenomenon from which women cannot escape. Other elements of nature such as drought and wind are associated with another female character, Vera Chipewa. As Vera's miseries increase due to ill-treatment and abandonment by her husband in the opening chapters of the text, these acts are happening when the land is dry and dusty as rains arrive very late, and there is a strong violent wind that disturbs what is supposed to be Vera's beautiful morning (p.14). Although Kayira's act of associating women with nature might be viewed by some as suggesting his support for patriarchy which tries to use such thinking to justify women's oppression, this is not the case. The truth of the matter is that Kayira is simply acknowledging the existence of that association as one of the contructions that makes women serve as a symbol of the nation. Although he has echoed such existing constructions, the most important thing in his text is how he has shown that such images, which are often taken for granted, mask real issues surrounding the country's nationhood or the state of affairs in the nation like Malawi. He has done that by using disruptions in nature to show that the connection women have with nature is not as smooth as it is assumed. In other instances, he has denied constructing the nation as a natural phenomenon defined by extended kinship ties and characterized by ties between the collectivity and the land using the place of foreign born nationals. I turn to this point later.

There are implications in presenting Vera as a woman who can no longer bear children and Isabella as experiencing illegitimate motherhood. Since children represent the future of the nation, the death of Vera's children as well as her inability to produce children afterwards speak to Kayira's perception of the political and developmental future of Malawi. This is so bearing in mind that the leaders who were in power during the time the novel was written were responsible for the death of the nation's vision and aspirations that had motivated the independence struggle. So while the Malawi nation is widely conceptualized as "Mother Malawi", troubled motherhood and wifehood in *The Civil Servant* are tools for representing the nation's legacy of exploitation and problematic politics as the people have historically been denied of their freedoms, personal development and basic human rights in the same manner Vera, Isabella and Enid are. Troubled motherhood and wifehood are clearly highlighted by the love story between sets of couples such as George Chipewa and his wife, Vera in which loss of love between them exposes how fake the "Mother Malawi" image is. Kayira portrays that image as mere rhetoric. He also uses the plot structure in which loss of love between couples represents loss of love between the political leadership and the people they govern. The love story is therefore an allegory of failure of political governance as an aspect of nationhood in Malawi during Kamuzu Banda's era in which the government has brought misery and lack of meaningful development in the country thereby threatening the future of the nation. Since Mr George Chipewa, the senior government clerk often comes to the office with a hangover and does virtually nothing except reading newspapers, drinking tea and roaming the streets of Banya in search for women to sleep with and beer (p.16), he represents a lazy and irresponsible government.

Kayira has also used the mother figure to explore the boundaries of the country's nationhood especially the issue of citizenship through the prism of race, class, ethnicity and gender. For example, through his representation of some women characters, Kayira indirectly asks, "Is

the Malawi nation only black?" In his book, *Unreasonable Histories*, Christopher Lee (2014) looks at the coloured community in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe and how this group, which is quite sizeable, troubles nativist conceptualizations of the nation in these countries and even beyond. In his submission, the African continent has a diverse heritage that has implications on the definition and boundaries of what it means to be Malawian, Zambian or Zimbabwean. So the whole discourse that the Malawi nation is a nation for black people is dismissed because according to Lee, racial minorities have a historical entanglement with the rest in postcolonial Africa. Using the "Mother Malawi" image reflected in the Malawi national anthem, the dominant view is that this image is an aspect of cultural nationalism in which the idea of the nation as a woman is a carried-over image from the ancient Chewa Kingdom, the Maravi Kingdom from which the country draws its name and symbols of the nation. Kayira challenges that view using wome's agency that is restorative of the desired state of the nation and therefore geared towards change.The problem which the traditional imagination of the nation presents is that it ecouurages the Malawi nation to be imagined as a nation for black people, particularly of Chewa or Maravi tribal origin. To most people, to be Malawian has become equivalent to speaking the Chichewa language and practising the Chewa cultural traditions and customs which have been widely accepted as representing those of all the other tribes that constitute Malawi. In *The Civil Servant*, while Vera is not from Malawi but a South African born coloured, her 'colouredness' could be construed as a way of probing the boundaries of race and nation. Vera has become a naturalised citizen through marriage and whatever marital problems she is experiencing are not prompting her to go back to her country. She considers George Chipewa's home as her home and has become the custodian of their house when George is away. The county's imagination as a nation for black people of Chewa background is therefore at odds with Vera's claims to her Malawian citizenship. The point that Kayira wants to highlight is that although all the people belonging

to the Malawi nation-state are deemed to be citizens of the republic, not all enjoy the same rights and freedoms, and not everybody is treated the same way or governed by the same rules and regulations. In most nations, some of the factors that affect people's citizenship include ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, gender and even place of residence. Even opportunities in life and access to basic needs and social services differ substantially depending upon those factors identified above. In the text, we come across the beggar and Demero's neighbour who are so poor that they cannot lead a normal life. The old beggar, for example, is on the verge of starving to death and his conditions are slowly but surely driving him to insanity. The beggar claims that he has had no food for two days, only water to keep himself alive (p.142) while Demero's neighbour, the shack-dwelling messenger soothes himself and his family by playing the guitar every evening at his house as a way of assuring himself of his existence and parrying the family's never-ending financial hardships (p.143). All these hardships are taking place while characters such as George Chipewa are living in luxury, drinking day in day out. The picture so created is such that the two categories of people live in two different worlds and yet both claim to be full citizens of the same republic.

Illtreatment and the poverty situation among certain characters are happenning against the assumption that a modern nation-state is constructed on the principle of equality of its citizens before the law and equal access to basic social services (Yuval-Davis 1997: 12). As *The Civil Servant* demonstrates, however, Isabella dies as a result of restrictions placed on her personhood as discourses such as "bringing shame on one's family" following her pregnancy force her to undertake a dangerous journey in search for the father of her unborn baby. On the part of Enid, the text shows that her harelip problem (itself a symbol of a deformed society) has stayed medically unattended to in spite of the fact that she is a full citizen of the nation. Isabella and Enid's citizenships are put into question on the basis of their gender and class. Their being female and being of low class due to their poor backgrounds put them at a great

disadvantage in terms of their freedom and access to services that would accord them a high quality of life. The text documents how sadly Enid is forced by her parents to wait on someone who is clearly not interested to marry her. The two women, Isabella and Enid stand out in society satisfying the "good woman" requirement wherein their victimhood lies. Just like Enid has accepted her predicament, women like Vera and Isabella have learned to live with their sadness. The elements of womanhood highlighted above are embedded in the respective romantic storylines that form the plot of the text to explore women conditions at the hands of men, the government and patriarchal structures of society but used to reveal a reality that goes beyond women.

The question of national citizenship is further explored through two love storylines focusing on Demero and Vivian Pike. Vivian is a white English girl still working in the newly independent Malawi as a bank clerk. Demero breaks his engagement with Enid at the time their marriage is imminent and falls in love with Vivian. There are white people who have permanently settled in Malawi, a scenario which complicates the citizenship question just like what the coloured community does. In the text, love relationships cross national, societal and even racial boundaries as a way of imagining an alternative definition of the nation, one that is all encompassing. Since the mother is nurturing and accommodating, it is possible that Kayira, in his act of contesting the definition of the existing Malawi nation, is evoking the mother figure to imagine a nationhood for Malawi that is all accommodating unlike the one defined in line with the Chewa nationalism which is ethnic and racist. After all, depicting Malawi in feminine terms can equally be interpreted as showing that Malawi is one large family since the mother unites everybody. In this case, Malawi should be conceived of as a mother for all who live in it, who unites diverse tribal and racial groups and promotes social cohesion. This is one of the issues which Kayira's engagement of the feminist representation of the nation may be trying to bring out. Kayira's politics of asserting an alternative definition

of the nation to that associated with the Chewa tribe edges the country towards internationality. This is supported by the plot of the story in the sense that by the time the story ends, the two foreign-born women namely Vera and Vivian are happy as Vera understandably reconciles with her husband following a long period of turmoil in their marriage, and Vivian is formally engaged to Demero and their wedding plans are announced. The happy ending and the reconciliation is captured in the following dialogue:

> "… Vera and I hope to go on holiday."
>
> "When?"
>
> "As soon as possible. I didn't have a holiday last year so I'm entitled to two months this year."
>
> "That's good," Demero said, "You see, Vivian and I hope to get married then."
>
> They talked on like that for the rest of the day. They were all happy and life seemed to smile again on Mr Chipewa who, in the general excitement around him, was slowly beginning to forget his dreams with Isabella. Demero laughed the loudest.
>
> "I'm sure you will be happy," Mr Chipewa said.
>
> "I know we will," Demero said.
>
> Vivian smiled and felt like crying with happiness. Vera served tea.
>
> "Why aren't we always happy like this? Vera asked.
>
> "This is just the beginning," Demero said. "We'll all be happier tomorrow." (p. 248).

On the other hand, the local women namely Isabella, Enid and Monica Mpazi are all sad by the time the story ends. In the case of Isabella, she has died in a miscarriage in an event which can be regarded as the climax of the story. In short Kayira has supported the coloured people's claims to Malawi's citizenship with the plot structure.

In further showing plot as a tool in Kayira's politics of narrating the nation, we note that there is unconsummated love between Vera Chipewa and Demero, and unfulfilled marriage between Demero and Enid, his ideal village girl. At the same time, George Chipewa's wish that he and Isabella get married is also unfulfilled. I opine that the plot of *The Civil Servant* is constructed using the motif of lack of fulfilment to support the gaps, questions or inadequacies that are there in defining Malawi's nationhood such as citizenship.

The novel also makes a direct reference to the unfair treatment of the northern region of Malawi and its people as reflected in the following dialogue between Demero, a northerner and Mrs Vera Chipewa:

> "George says that you are a northerner, is that right?
>
> "Yes."
>
> "I haven't been up there but I hear it is very beautiful."
>
> "Very poor too," he said.
>
> "Only the north is worse, perhaps because it has been neglected all these years"
>
> "I don't want to get into the politics of it," she said, "Do you have a family?" (p. 42).

Questioning the citizenship of people who are not Chewa has been a common phenomenon in Malawi. The northern region of Malawi is said to be so far behind the other two regions in terms of social and infrastructural development. The condition and the limited number of the roads and other social amenities such as colleges are noticeable. Scholars such as Chirwa (2001) and Mphande (1996) have alleged that Kamuzu Banda's loathing for the northern region and lack of interest to develop the region during his thirty year rule in addition to the colonialists' general neglect for the region in terms of development (the colonial leaders constantly referred to it as the dead north), have historically turned the north into a springboard for political dissent and social change. It is the north which became an early backer for pro-independence sentiments during colonial rule with the formation of the North

Nyasa Native Association. Many years later, it was again the north which became an early backer for pro-democracy sentiments with the formation of the first pressure group, the Alliance for Democracy by Chakufwa Tom Chihana, a northerner (Chirwa 2001:17). And in spite of all these, northerners are sidelined in politics and are often regarded as half citizens of the republic as depicted in the excerpt from *The Civil Servant* above.

5.4 The Problem of Patriotism in Malawi as Depicted in *The Civil Servant*

Although the country (Malawi) has gained independence, England and South Africa shine in the minds of most locals as the beacon of development and progress. Continued preoccupation with things British, for instance, has gone on well after Malawi became independent. The character Bingo yearns for England and Demero abandons his African girl, Enid for the English girl, Vivian claiming that marrying Vivian would give him prestige and many opportunities in life. The text, through Demero's cousin Batani states that before Vivian came into the picture, Demero used to love Enid and assured her that he was going to marry her. Hence the English girl represents a foreign nation that has enticed Demero into a love relationship which leads to breakdown of his engagement with End in spite of the long period of waiting on the part of Enid. Demero's yearning for Vivian is symbolic of how much the postcolonial African nation wants to adopt western culture and ideals, something which points to the issue of patriotism or lack of it. The idea of patriotism is explored through Enid's physical disability and the resultant abandonment by Demero, the man she was betrothed to. This exposes lack of love and care for its people by the state, in short, lack of patriotism. Demero would have taken Enid to the hospital if he really loved and cared about her. Alternatively, the government would have done so. Although the country has gained independence, London (the west) still wields great influence in dictating how the local people value their nation as they still regard the west as the beacon of development, progress and knowledge. When characters such as Enid's father, General Zombe and Bingo continue to

identify themselves with the former coloniser, for example, their actions come out as a manifestation of how much unfulfilled they are with their country as citizens. This tells us that there is lack of patriotism on the part of Malawi's nationals. In most cases such people find it very easy to relocate, work and settle in other countries such as the United Kingdom and South Africa as Isabella's husband and Demero have done. This echoes a discourse in common circulation which states that Malawians are known for their love for travelling. They leave the country to look for work in other countries and in most cases they never come back (Kayira 1965: 86). Besides, their minds are preoccupied with foreign things. In fact several characters in *The Civil Servant* such as Demero, Bingo and General Zomba represent this preoccupation with things British. In the context of Malawi, Chirwa (2001) and Mphande (1996) have argued separately that Kamuzu Banda continued emulating the west even after the country had attained independence, and he kept on dragging the entire country along that path during thirty years of his rule. The plot shows George vying for a woman from South Africa to become his wife and his fellow clerk, Dimero vying for the British national. Kayira might have used this development as a means for highlighting the problem of patriotism in most formerly colonized nations including Malawi.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Kayira has put the image of woman as the nation at the centre of his narration of the Malawi nation to achieve political aims. Although the Malawi nation is traditionally imagined as a woman, Kayira has exposed this image to be a mere rhetoric by featuring women's experiences and their status in society as far removed from the glorified symbol of "Mother Malawi". By so doing, his portrayal echoes the ideas expressed by Jolly (1994) who views the image of women as the nation in postcolonal Africa and other parts of the world as a masculinist construction that hides the truth, that is, depressing realities surrounding women and the nation's citizens. In my analysis of *The Civil Servant*, I have demonstrated how

Kayira has constructed the image of woman in which the female characters display characteristics that universally qualify women as figures of the nation such as suffering, perseverance and biological reproduction of the collectivity. Kayira has also done that by showing women's collective suffering as wholly caused by the masculinist power of the state represented by male government clerks and patriarchs such as fathers both of whom treat women as objects. This is done to highlight the negative impact of masculinist nationalism that continues to characterize the postcolonial Malawian nation. Kayira has, therefore, appropriated the rhetoric of motherland and the symbolization of that rhetoric in his narration of the Malawi nation to confront aspects of nationhood such as the question of citizenship and patriotism, and to expose endemic exploitation and suffering of the people which the "Mother Malawi" image masks. Each female character in *The Civil Servant* has particular elements related to her sexuality or physical body which Kayira has utilized to articulate his views about the country's citizenship, patriotism and endemic exploitation and suffering of the people. In that regard, Vera's mixed race is used to interrogate the nation's image as a nation for black people (Africans) which the "Mother Malawi" image evokes. This citizenship question is raised by relating the origins of the mother symbol and the matrilineal nature of the Chewa society to the origins of Vera as a South African-born coloured and is thought of as Kayira's act of expanding the definition of the Malawi nation to that which embraces everybody regardless of their race, class or ethnic or national background in a true spirit of internationality. The question of patriotism is explored through Enid's physical disability and abandonment by Demero, to expose lack of love, care and commitment to the nation-state by some Malawians that Demero and a few other characters represent. Isabella's expoitation by George Chipewa represents how Malawians are exploited by masculinist powers such as those of the state and patriarchy. Kayira has used all these portrayals to reveal what the mother image of the nation takes for granted such as the suffering of the people.

After revealing the true character which the mother image conceals he then challenges it through women's agency and satire to advance a kind of nation founded on universal values of equality, fairness and democracy. I have therefore argued that it is possible that Kayira is evoking the mother image to expose the true realities of women who represent the nation in line with his progressive vision and to argue for a more inclusive definition of the nation which the mother is naturally endowed with, that of nurturing and accommoding everyone who lives in the home. The depictions of the nation in this text reveal the complexities of the process of narrating the nation which sometimes ends in self-contradiction on the part of the novelist.

6.0 CHAPTER SIX: Nation Imagination in the Context of a Dictatorship: Crossing the Boundaries of the Nation towards a Common Humanity in *The Detainee*

> *"It is inappropriate to treat nation-state as the main type of society since there are more nations than states…. Polities overlap notwithstanding the popular myth of the nation-state sovereignity over a given territory".*
>
> (Walby, 2003)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to examine politics of narrating the Malawi nation as a dictatorship, in particular, Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship as a zone of conflict in *The Detainee*. When there is political oppression in form of a fully-fledged dictatorship, national imagination becomes problematic partly because the historical nationhood gets lost in the divisions and the social engineering the dictatorship creates. The chapter, therefore, focuses on two aspects of nationhood namely: political governance and growing internationalism, and how Legson Kayira uses them to articulate his ideas about the Malawi national imagination and contestation during a dictatorship. That task is accomplished by exploring how Kayira has used the novel about dictatorship that shifts the focus away from the dictator to the people as victims. This is unlike a typical dictator novel that focuses on the dictator himself or herself through whom the story of the nation is narrated (Spenser, 2012). As Spenser observes, during a dictatorship, the imagination of the nation becomes problematic since the dictator usurps the nation's history, culture and character in a way that such elements of nationhood become threads in exalting his or her life. The end result is that due to the alienation which the dictatorship creates, certain groups are forced to imagine the nation in whatever way

possible which in most cases is in conflict with the official imagination imposed by the dictatorship. Hence the chapter is a representation of the various imaginings of the nation during the dictatorship by examining the conflict between various groups of characters who represent competing forces in nation imagination. In *The Detainee*, these imaginings are reflected through the interplay of nationalisms aligned with specific groups of people but the search for universal values and a common humanity by most groups casts nation imagination in the realm of internationality as the main thrust of Kayira's polititics of narrating the nation. In this connection, the chapter highlights the aspect of universal values and common humanity in *The Detainee* which Kayira raises through the theme of legitimacy of the Malawi nation-state as a collectivity under a dictatorship. Kayira brings this aspect to the fore by exposing the role of external bodies and tropes of mobility in nation construction, its legitimacy and contestation. In this novel, Legson Kayira, therefore, signals his post-nationalist thinking by depicting the Malawi nation as having clearly demarcated but open borders which are crossed time and again as a way of the questioning the nation's boundaries and meaning. In the novel, the external pressure and influence to which the government succumbs and characters' acts of physical and psychological emigration are a clear indication that the modern nation, whether in a dictatorship or not, is in a precarious position in the wake of growing internationalsm that results in its diminishing relevance, power and authority. The school of thought of postmodernism is used to expose the damage which dictatorships cause to national imagination.

In terms of approach, the first section thrashes out issues to do with a novel about dictatorship as distinguished from a dictator novel. This section is important for it helps to justify why Kayira has chosen such a genre, that is, to focus on the people as the nation in order to explore how 'Malawianness' is imagined in its various possibilities in the context of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship. The next section tackles Malawi's nationhood as it is

constructed by Dr Banda's dictatorship. This section highlights the role of humour, irony and the surreal as weapons for critiquing the nationhood which the Banda's dictatorship had constructed. I then proceed to explore the imagination of the nation on the basis of infrastructural development using the relationship between Napolo's village and the village ruled by Chief Rata (the rural) on the one hand and the City of Banya (the urban representing the modern Malawi nation) on the other. That is also done within the context of the novel about dictatorship. I then take the discussion to the postnationalist thrust of the novel using tropes of mobility and the role played by external bodies in the process of imagining and contesting the Malawi nation. This is also discussed within the same parameters of the novel about dictatorship. *The Detainee* is shown to dwell on the relationship between the nation and dictatorship, and it is the novel in which Legson Kayira argues for the need to open up the nation to discourses of human rights and democracy as key markers of internationality**.** The sections in this chapter highlight the interplay of various sub-nationalisms in the text under study as all such nationalisms focus on attainment of common or universal values which are a strong pillar on which internationalism is constructed.

6.2 The Synopsis of Legson Kayira's *The Detainee*

The protagonist of the story is Napolo, a simple village man who decides to leave his village in a remote part of northern Malamoza to seek medical assistance for his hernia condition in the city of Banya. Napolo walks for several days to a bus depot at Sengo and waits for the bus which never shows up. He is stuck at Sengo Trading Centre for several days. In the course of waiting for the bus, Napolo resides temporarily in a resthouse there which is close to the bus depot. Napolo resides in that resthouse alongside other travellers among whom is Hona. Napolo has never travelled out of his village his entire life and is surprised by what he discovers regarding the state of affairs in the country most of which only reach his village as rumours.

While still waiting for the bus, Napolo comes face-to-face with members of the Youth Brigade, a paramilitary wing instituted by the Malamoza's ruling People's Party who ask him to produce his party membership card. The party's leader and President of the Republic of Malamoza, Sir Zaddock rules the country with a heavy hand. He is President-for-life and has banned all the other political parties from operating in the country. A number of slogans and myths have been constructed to boost his image as a leader whose wisdom, authority and achievements are unquestionable and unparalleled. He is touted as Africa's greatest son, the redeemer, owner and ruler of the country. The president has planted spies all over the country to apprehend the so-called rebels. People are disappearing in the country in large numbers as reported by Hona in the resthouse while they are waiting for the bus.

Since the bus is not expected to arrive for several weeks, Napolo and Hona decide to walk to the city. The journey is going to take them several days. To Napolo's surprise, the Young Brigades have mounted a number of roadblocks where vehicles and passengers including those going by foot are searched and interrogated. Napolo does not understand how things could have changed so much since the colonialists left ten years ago. After walking the whole day, the two arrive at Chief Rata's village and decide that they are going to rest for the night at Mazito's house, a long-time friend to Hona.

In the course of chatting at Mazito's house that night, Mazito explains to his visitors that people are disappearing in his area on a daily basis like in other areas. Most of them are beaten, kidnapped and thrown in crocodile-infested rivers by members of the Young Brigade. Napolo wonders whether the President is aware of such things. Generally, he feels very safe and comfortable in Chief Rata's village as everything feels natural. The following day, Napolo has a good chat with the chief himself and his male folk over a feast of local beer and plenty of food. He sleeps in Chief Rata's village that night then he proceeds on his journey alone since Hona and Mazito have not returned from the villages where they had gone the

previous night to look for local beer and women. It later transpires that the two had some disagreements with local members of the Young Brigade and ended up being secretly arrested. It is more of a kidnap than an arrest. Napolo himself also ends up being tricked at a roadblock and is taken into a mysterious detention camp known as the Snake Camp where the government keeps perceived traitors and political detainees. Some days later, Hona joins in and Napolo learns that Mazito was murdered at a separate detention camp although the official storyline is that he committed suicide.

Napolo and Hona are kept at this camp for weeks where some of the suspected rebels have been detained for three years or more. Nobody knows the detainees' whereabouts or if they are still alive. Twice Napolo is subjected to interrogations by Paka and Jancha but he insists that he is innocent. Later, Paka proposes to Napolo to 'silence' Hona who is spreading rumours about Mazito's murder both inside and outside the camp. Napolo refuses hence the Snake Camp authorities decide to eliminate both him and Hona. Intuitively, Napolo gets a sense of what is to befall him and writes a letter to his wife asking her to offer sacrifices to the ancestors to deliver him. After he satisfies himself that the letter has been successfully smuggled out of the Snake Camp and has been delivered to his wife, his moods improve significantly and is set for the impending ordeal. To Jancha, the mere fact that Napolo was in the company of Hona and Mazito whom he describes as well-known traitors shows that he too is a traitor.

In the meantime, the International Council of Churches has announced that its members will be inspecting the Snake Camp in a few days to come and talk to individual detainees. Things happen so fast because the detainees are planning a revolt. As a result, the camp authorities decide to expedite the process of eliminating Hona being the most outspoken intellectual whom they fear is going to expose their brutality. They also decide to eliminate Napolo, his friend to cover up the murders. So one night, Napolo and Hona are taken away in a vehicle on

the pretext that they have been released and are being taken back to their homes. On the way the vehicle suddenly stops near a river and the two are forced out of the vehicle. Napolo sees Hona being stuck from behind with a metal bar and falling down and screaming with great agony. He then hears one long piercing and terrifying scream and then silence. Next, it is his turn. He too is hit on his shoulders and he falls to the ground unconscious although he is faintly aware of what is going on around him. In his half-conscious state he feels a sense of relief and peace which seems to pervade his whole being. He senses his body and that of Hona being disposed of in the river. At first he makes no effort to swim to the surface but suddenly, as though the cold water has revived him he regains his full consciousness and like someone possessed by some supernatural powers, he swims out of the water to safety in the bushes. But later he loses consciousness again due to the pain that had been inflicted on him. He lies unconscious in the bushes until he is discovered by a passer-by the following morning who takes him to a nearby clinic where he is officially pronounced dead and his body is put in a mortuary. Later that day, Napolo finds himself running like a ghost out of the mortuary. He runs madly until he crosses an international boundary into another country to safety.

6.3 The Role of Genre in Kayira's Politics of Narrating the Malawi Nation: The Case of *The Detainee* as a Novel about Dictatorship

Several countries that have undergone authoritarian rule at specific times in Africa, Latin America and the Arab world have produced what is popularly referred to as 'The Dictator Novel' in which the representation of the dictator is the main preoccupation of the authors. Robert Spencer (2012) provides valuable insights regarding the distinction between a dictator novel and a novel set in or about dictatorship. A dictator novel focuses on the actual performance of power of the dictator by mimicking his authority although it also deconstructs that authority by exposing its unreliability, general fallibility and vulnerabilities to democratic forms of governance. A novel about dictatorship on the other hand does not focus on the

dictator but what is happening to the people within the context of a dictatorship. Such a novel may deconstruct elements of governance and nationhood in a manner similar to the way the dictator novel deconstructs the dictator's authority as indicated above.

In my case, I am interested in how the nation is imagined, constructed and contested within the context of a novel about dictatorship by exploring how *The Detainee* represents various charcteristics of the dictatorship of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda. The idea of a novel about dictatorship does not, as Spencer (2012) points out, negate all aspects of a dictator novel (and the line separating the two is thin) but that in displaying most of those aspects, such displays are tools for directly exploring societal issues rather than being about the dictator per se as would be the case with the dictator novel. By focusing the story on the experiences of the local man, Napolo, who happens to be the victim and not being preoccupied with the dictator (the perpetrator), Kayira is able to directly explore what has happened to the Malawi nation which Napolo embodies. Hence my focus is on the representation of the nation (the people or society) in a novel that is set in a dictatorship in which the ordinary person representing the nation is the centre of the narrative and not the dictator (leader). Suffice to say that the novel about dictatorship (and not the dictator novel) is Kayira's genre of choice and I explore how he has utilized that genre to achieve his aims thus his politics of narrating the Malawi nation. One indication that *The Detainee* is not a dictator novel lies in the fact that nowhere in the novel do the readers meet the ruler, Sir Zaddock Mlingo in person but learn a lot about him through the experiences of Napolo at the hands of members of the Youth Brigade.

Kayira's *The Detainee* deals with what has happened to the ordinary person as a subject and by implication, the nation as a collectivity which the ordinary person, Napolo embodies under dictatorial rule. According to Scandura and Thurson (2001), the idea that the ordinary person-cum protagonist such as Napolo should be regarded as the embodiment of the nation is based on the principle of 'incorporation' in which "[t]he protagonist becomes the body and mind

through which the experiences of the nation are processed and sifted through. The ordinary person embodies the nation since his personhood is used to register the crisis and upheaval that the nation is going through" (ibid, p. 20). The exploration of what has happened to the ordinary person as a subject could be pursued through themes such as alienation, subjugated dignity of the people, corruption and underdevelopment that characterize both the dictator novel and the novel about dictatorship (Galam 2008). In this connection, the experiences and perceptions of certain characters show that certain people in Malawi during Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's rule did not feel part of the nation. Dr Banda's regime was preoccupied with bolstering tyrannical rule instead of focusing on national development and the welfare of the people. In the text, it can be observed that the ordinary man represented by Napolo was treated as sub-human if the actions of the Young Brigades and the language used against Napolo are taken into account.

6.4 Malawi's Nationhood, the Dictatorship and the Role of Humour, Irony and the Surreal in Contesting such Nationhood

My main task in this section is to show how the novel about dictatorship genre has enabled the author to explore the country's troubled nationhood as depicted through the experiences of the local man represented by Napolo, Chief Rata and Hona. In particular I focus on the author's critique of dictatorship as a form of governance through humour, irony and the surreal to expose, censure, disavow, mock and denounce the kind of nationhood which dictatorships construct for the people.

Kellas (1993) notes that because of the manner in which nations were created, much of Africa has civic nationalism where several ethnicities have been brought under one fold to form a nation which is held together by the state power. In the text, the dictatorship tries to promote a sense of homogeneity among the various tribes in the country using coercive means by manipulating language as a cultural element necessary for nation-building. Reflecting this

kind of 'artificial' nationhood that thrives on rumour as existing in the country under a dictatorship, Chief Rata asks the following about the State President:

> "He may have our skin and our likeness but I sometimes wonder if he is really one of us. He can't even speak our tongue…. But do you speak the new tongue?"
>
> "What new tongue, my lord?"
>
> "I don't know but I understand the great one has decreed that the dialect of some tiny little tribe will now be the tongue of Malamoza. They'll soon start teaching it in schools …" (p.47)

Language whether marked as national language or official language is often used to create a sense of homogeneity both during colonial rule as well as dictatorship as indicated in the exchange between Chief Rata and Napolo above. But in a dictatorship, instead of nurturing unity, the dictatorship often divides the people and relies on manipulation of the masses, imposition of policies formulated without consultation and excessive use of force to keep the nation together. In that scenario, a dictatorship constructs a nation based on artificial pillars. Hence, nation construction may be based on the promotion of one tribe at the expese of others or follow the normal route of fostering unity and employ acceptable strategies of forging a collective consciousness that appeals to all groups in a country. Tribalism as practiced by the dictatorship has been observed as a very big problem in Malawi (Kaspin 1997). Although Sir Zaddock is attempting to build the nation by creating a common language, the process is forced upon the people and ignores the reality on the ground regarding the status of the language he has chosen to serve as a national language. In the process, this move alienates some tribes further. Kayira is critical of the the form of nationhood which divides the people along ethnic lines as it disrupts the natural processes of collective imagination.

Use of the dictatorship genre has enabled Legson Kayira to explore Malawi's troubled nationhood by making Napolo the battleground between the dictatorship and the people. The name of the main character, "Napolo" to which the title of the text refers, is associated with the myth of Napolo, a well-known phenomenon in the local Malawian mythology. According to Chalamanda (2001), Napolo is supposed to be a mythical snake that is believed to reside underneath the Zomba Mountain in southern Malawi. Periodically the snake is believed to migrate within the labyrinth of Malawi from under the Zomba Mountain to Lakes Malawi and Chilwa which lie in the valley below thereby causing flash floods, landslides and earthquakes that lead to many deaths and destruction to the country's infrastructure, property and landscape. Chalamanda is quick to point out that Malawian writers such as Steve Chimombo have used this myth (the myth of Napolo) with such versatility that it represents so many things that are destructive to the nation ranging from political regimes, the repressed unconscious to HIV/AIDS. Thus the Napolo myth, whenever it is used or evoked, applies to the nation at large because the effects of the Napolo phenomenon are always felt by the wider community rather than only at the individual level. The relevance of the evocation of the Naopolo myth lies in highlighting the destructive nature of the nationhood constructed by the dictatorship as that characterized by death of the nation's history, vision, culture and identity.

However, unlike in other usages of the Napolo phenomenon we have so far witnessed, Kayira depicts the character, Napolo as a victim of Sir Zaddock's autocratic rule and the colonial rule that preceded it. By referencing the cultural myth that represents destruction and by featuring an ordinary person who embodies the nation, the role of dictatorship in the destruction of the national spirit is registered. The specific aspects of nationhood which Kayira believes have been destroyed by Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship include Napolo's simplicity, his personal history and freedom which represent the erosion of the nation's tribal nature, distortion of its history and vision and erosion of its sovereignity respectively. The

opening line of the novel Kayira writes, “The only remarkable thing about Napolo was his simplicity – the naïve and trusting simplicity of a villager whose greatest worry in the world is the failure of rain and, hence, the failure of his crops” (p. 1). But by the end of the novel we see Napolo acting in ways which show that he is not naïve and trusting. Napolo’s encounter with security elements on his journey to the city has transformed him into a suspicious, alert and sophisticated thinker. Distortion of the country’s history and vision manifests in how the nation-state has greatly disrupted Napolo’s village life as well as its aspirations associated with the spirits of the ancestors. Sovereignity on its part manifests in how the creation of the nation-state has robbed Napolo of his identity and freedom to travel the way he would have loved and to define himself according to his ancestors. Due to the nature of governance (the dictatorship), Napolo is identified using instruments put in place by the state instead of doing so with respect to his ancestral background. As Napolo travels to the city, for example, he is officially identified by using the party membership card and the region he comes from rather than his historical background, personal achievements and lineage. In the period after independence in which the story is set, it is only the instruments put in place by colonialism such as regions and those created by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda’s regime such as the party membership card that give Napolo some form of identity and history. The state power has among other things established regions and administrative centres such as Mfinda where Napolo hails from which contribute to his new identity. Besides, Napolo has been depicted as reliant on the whiteman’s knowledge, technology and medicine all of which signify that he has been robbed of his traditional life and identity.

It is tempting to think that Kayira has employed the figure of Napolo to address Malawi’s situation during Kamuzu Banda’s dictatorship by linking the real to the fantastic where the extraordinary phenomenon destroys the ordinary one. For example, Napolo is consistently concerned with the life-giving and life-sustaining spirit of the nation which has eluded Dr

Hastings Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship. He has consistently demonstrated such a spirit himself by helping the woman who had travelled with several children without money to buy food on the long journey (p.25); his concern for rains that have come late and and love for personal safety like what an ideal nation does which is usually concerned with nourishing, protecting and caring for its citizens. His mysterious disease in the form of a hernia condition which is associated with reproduction represents the strangeness of the kind of nationhood which the dictatorship has constructed. This symbolization has enabled the author to depict undesired elements of the country's nationhood associated with colonial rule and Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's post-independence dictatorship that have been imposed on the people.

By focusing on the people, unlike the dictator, the novel has also highlighted a nationhood in which certain groups are not regarded as part of the nation. In the novel under study, northerners are not considered as true Malawians if the exchange below is anything to go by:

> "Who are you?"
>
> "Napolo."
>
> "Never mind your name, I mean where are you from?"
>
> "The north"
>
> "Sir!"
>
> "The north, Sir."
>
> "A villager?"
>
> "Yes Sir."
>
> "North people, especially villagers, are witches to a man," the other young man said and laughed in a teasing manner. "They can destroy a bridge like this one simply by looking at it. They destroy with their eyes."

"… We don't want you scoundrels trampling on our roads!

"Are we strangers in our own land?" Napolo ventured to ask (p.75-78).

The northern region is excluded or at least pushed to the margins in the process of nation imagination. While members of the Youth Brigade are displaying love for the country by passionately guarding it against enemies, northerners are regarded as some of the enemies of the nation-state whose access to public infrastructure should either be limited or completely denied. The exchange above implies that the nation, according to the Youth Brigades, excludes the northern region and the people who come from there. This kind of thinking is reflected in many instances in Kayira's writing and in real life such as those where people from the other two regions are often unwilling to vote for northerners vying for high public offices during elections. Thus the discriminatory attitude expressed by members of the Youth Brigade shows the fallibility of belonging to the nation created by the dictatorship whereby some people have more rights than others to the extent that those discriminated against no longer feel part of the nation. Such people may become so disgruntled that they may end up developing a different national consciousness in their minds that would work against that of the Malawi nation. What is implied in the exchange between the guards reflected above is that if northerners are to be accepted as true Malawians they need to transform by shedding off their regional and tribal identities that are regarded as non-Malawian (most of such ethnic groups are in the patrilineal northern region) and adopt those that would qualify them to become 'real' Malawians which is matrilineal (Mkandawire, 2010).

The problem with nationalism, as scholars like Chatterjee (1993) have argued, is that it is a force that can sway the masses in whatever direction the nationalists want in their attempts to satisfy their interests. Kayira is keen on exposing this reality about nationalism. In this text, he has highlighted the workings of anticolonial nationalism which the dictatorship of Sir

Zaddock, a caricature of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda is using to justify his rule. Zaddock's dictatorship threatens the masses that colonialism would come back if it is not adequately supported. In addition, his regime is pushing the narrative that colonialists were strangers who had come to suck up the country's resources such that their ousting was warranted or that they were in no way 'one of us' (p. 47). This is done to paint a picture that colonial rule was unnatural to the local people who formed the majority that had naturally inherited the land of their ancestors after driving the colonialists away as they did. But such a narrative advanced by the dictatorship does not tell the whole truth and is meant to downplay its own unnaturalness and the suffering of the people. This confirms the fact that the new regime of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, though presented as a victory over an otherwise oppressive and undeserving colonial rule, constructed an artificial nationhood based on fear, lies and manipulation of the masses. Interestingly, Kayira has shown that even the new regime is as artificial to the people as the colonial rule that had preceded it although it has many people who are supporting it. This echoe's Chatterjee (1993) observation that nationalism is not an objective phenomenon in that for it to succeed it must displace another force whose appeal is declining at that particular time. But this displacement is not total and does not necessarily mean that the new nationalism is better than the old one. Kayira portrayal shows that he is condemning the country's nationhood created by both colonial and anti-colonial nationalisms since none of them promoted universal values such as equality, respect for human rights and democracy whose desirability does not change. He has done that by satirizing Sir Zaddock's dictatorship.

Since it is true that all nations are created and sustained through myth and propaganda of one sort or another, Kayira is critical of the idea of the nation altogether and his text suggests a form of collective existence that transcends the nation as he has set his eyes on a mode of social organization and control that accommodates everyone and respects the dignity of and

works for everyone. He has, for example, dismissed the dictatorship's insistence on nationhood but has instead emphasized the importance of continuity of regimes, coexixtence of people of various backgrounds, interdependability of races and a shared destiny all of which are markers of internationality. For example, Naopolo's hernia condition requires a sophisticated medical procedure which can only be performed by a white doctor in that social setting thereby depicting the significance of interdependability of races in his ideal society as reflected in the exchange between Napolo and hona below:

> "He must be there. I've been told that there is always a white doctor in a big town."
>
> "That is true but how are you going to locate him?"
>
> "I will ask around till I find him."
>
> "You are that much determined to see him?"
>
> "So would you be, I expect, if you had my illness" (P.17).

Apart from running after the whiteman's medicine, Napolo adds that he is using the whiteman's money, clothes and technology all of which point to inevitable interdependability of races (p.26).

As far as continuity is concerned, this is shown when, as Napolo travels through Sengo Trading Centre, he notices that there have been no renovations on the buildings since the end of colonial rule as is supposed to be the case and that most of the public infrastructure in the country such as bridges, roads and others constructed by the colonial administration have simply been renamed by the new regime instead of maintaining their names and building new ones (p.5). The text decries lack of continuity created by the dictatorship since such scenarios expose the falsehood of nationhhod that was constructed by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship which portrayed itself as at loggerhead with the colonial nationhood. Since

Kayira is condemning both the colonial and Dr Banda's nationhoods his criticism implies that he would have loved a scenario where the later nationhood maintains what its predecessor produced but also comes up with new additions since the focus of any nationhood is continuity of the country's socio-economic development.

Although the country is under a dictatorship and is still being constructed on the principle of religion using what can be described as religious nationalism, it is a different construct that shows no continuity with the past. In this construct, religion has turned agaist the nation-state instead of being its ally in oppressing and exploiting the citizens. Besides the text has constructed a national identity that combines Christianity and adherence to the spirits of the ancestors. Much as there is a well-known historical occurrence where religions such as Islam and Christianity have been part and parcel of dictatorships in certain parts of the world such as the Arab world, Europe and Africa, in *The Detainee*, however, both aspects of religion namely western religion and traditional African religion intervene in the affairs of the nation-state to save victims of oppression including Napolo. This intervention reveals lack of continuity as well as the vulnerability of the nation constructed by the dictatorship which appears to be founded on the ideals of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda and those of Malawi's colonial masters, the British. The vulnerability also becomes noticeable when the same text shows that in the mind of the common man such as Napolo, he is alienated and does not feel part of the nation. Usually the tribe where the dictator hails from supports the leadership's imagination of the nation and so do those groups which are directly benefitting from the dictatorial rule while other groups in the country create their own hidden meanings and imaginations of the same nation. This is unlike internationality where society is governed by the same human values that have come to be viewed as universal such as equality, respect for human rights and the rule of law since time immemorial.

As Ricouer (1999) notes, what would be a founding event in one's collective memory may be a wound in the memory of the 'other'. Ricouer's observation is applicable to a dictatorship since the country's nationhood is appropriated for the dictator's own benefit. But the major societal events that help define and consolidate the nation in the minds of the group that supports the dictatorship may be painful in the memory of the majority group which is oppressed and alienated. One such example is the attainment of independence which Sir Zaddock and his followers speak so fondly of in spite of the fact that in people's minds colonial rule was better than his rule. Painting Sir Zaddock's rule as better than colonial rule is not true in as far as Napolo and Chief Rata are concerned because to them the two regimes were different. This is unlike what Spenser (2012) holds when he states that "colonialism was a form of dictatorship, one that has not yet been brought to an end" (p.149). Spenser views the two as standing on the same plane with the only difference being that one is worse off but the general picture the text has created about the two is that they are different and that the latter is not a continuation of the former. The dictator's anticolonial nationalism has constructed nationalist discourses filled with absolute meanings and heroic symbols. However, the competing nationalism of Chief Rata and Napolo works against such symbols and images of the nation created by the dictatorship as they construct symbols of victimhood. At least that is how the two characters look at themselves relative to Sir Zaddock's rule. As Mbembe (1992) once observed, competing nationalisms are heteroglossic, multiple, dialogic and ambiguous as they entail several other social realities in their act of contesting and speaking to the dominant official nationalisms.

Apart from evoking the Napolo myth and direct criticisms of Sir Zaddock's dictatorship, Kayira has used other elements such as humour, irony and surreal actions. Dictatorships, because of their exaggerated actions, become good targets of satire. Humour, on the other hand, is rarely associated with narratives that deal with serious, tragic and traumatic events.

In the narration of most such events, the existence of humour is undervalued but whenever humour is used in literary texts it is done with the purpose of representing the absurdity of the situation the people are in, and in this case, absurdity of the nationhood that the dictatorship has created (Breckenridge, 2006). From an ideological perspective, therefore, humour can serve the role of being a counter-narrative for it can mock and challenge the state of affairs in a country. In *The Detainee,* it is hereby argued that humour is used as a weapon for critiquing the state of the nationhood under Hastings Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship. In this text, humour has taken many forms one of which is satire which as Jonathan Boutle (1993) suggests, politicizes laughter to subvert the dominant narratives and lay bare the gulf between truth and official reality. In this section I show how satire has been used to subvert ideas of political order and governance as an aspect of nationhood. For most scholars satire is militant irony because the moral norms it promotes are clear as it assumes standards against which the absurd and the grotesque are measured. In critiquing any imposed rule such as colonial rule and dictatorship, satire is often used to "[r]eject social reality including national identity which may have been generated for the people by the regime in which the people have no control over the creation of their own collective social and temporal reality" (Newell, 1997: 43). Not only does satire show the ruthlessness of the regime but, as I have already stated earlier, also serves as a rhetorical and ideological tool for critiquing the state of nationhood since it opens up a heteroglossic space within which the collective sense of 'Malawianness' and the state of Malawi's nationhood can be understood.

In one instance, the depiction of the detainees and their captors has been satirized by laughing at the excesses with which the Snake Camp guards exercise their authority and the extent to which the detainees obey them. Since Napolo and Hona have been forbidden from talking while they are supposedly being taken home following their fake release from the Snake Camp, Napolo asks, "Can I sneeze?" (p.163). Similarly, guards at the Snake Camp are

also ironically heard complaining secretly about their high poverty levels and lack of meaningful infrastructural development in the country even as they go around preaching a contrary message. Failure by Sir Zaddock's government to forge a viable economic plan for the post-colonial nation-state undermines the nation's claim to relevance. As such, the guards' secretive expression of excessive poverty strengthens observations that the dictatorship is spending most of its energy on social control instead of building the nation by salvaging the weak economy and bringing meaningful development to its people.

Irony is further reflected when the guards end up enslaving themselves in the process of enslaving the masses as both the Young Brigades and the people they put in detention camps are secluded from society and economic activities, hence they act insanely as a result (P.151). Turning things on their heads is a recurring feature in Kayira's *The Detainee* and it is used for purposes of contesting some of the discourses surrounding Dr Banda's rule and his concept of the nation. In this regard, *The Detainee* is constructed on the principle of hyperbolic irony that has characterized both the text and the nation in which what is obtaining on the ground runs counter to what Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's regime was preaching. Irony is founded on the principle of incongruity between the ideal and the real, an assertion that an idealized version of the society is in fact the desired version, and exaggeration is used to reveal the manipulation of the ideal nation, the dishonesty and stupidity of the whole situation created by the dictatorship. One of the discourses echoed time and again by members of the Youth Brigades is that Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda saved the people of Malawi from colonial bondage and brought them freedom. Another one stated that Dr Banda's rule was so powerful that no one could successfully undermine or challenge it. Both of these discourses are proved to be untrue and the text has constructed their counter-discourses through satire and the surreal. I discuss some of these counter-discourses later.

For now, note that although the dictator claims that his is a government for all, Napolo's confusion and lack of knowledge of what is currently happening in the country (these are depicted throughout the story) show that there is a group of people (the uneducated rural poor) who are so left behind in terms of development that they live in their own world. As a result they do not identify themselves with the modern Malawi nation. In most cases this group that is not actively participating in the economic life of the modern nation constitutes a large community in Malawi although the nation is usually projected as one single community in which individuals ought to claim a common identity. The text, thus, shows that the historical national progress has left the traditionalists behind. In the earlier days, information of where one hailed from was used to the benefit of the person concerned but in Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship, such information is used to victimise him or her as is the case with Napolo's status as a rural farmer from the northern region who is not regarded as a full member of the nation. Wherever Napolo goes since leaving his sanctuary (his village), he is treated with contempt.

Through his depiction of harmony that is prevailing in Chief Rata's village, Kayira is exposing what the alienation of the people who come from other ethnic groups from that of the dictator in the broader Malawian nation-state under a dictatorship can do. Chief Rata and his subjects are forced to construct their own sense of nationhood that stands in opposition to that of Sir Zaddock and the nation and thrives on performance of tribal rituals, customs and practices and withdrawal from the national stage. Kayira, therefore, evaluates the state of nationhood in a country under a dictatorship through the prism of ethnicity whereby members of some tribes are sidelined and discriminated against by Sir Zaddock's government because of tribal difference. All dictatorships thrive on dividing the people as they are nepotistic as portrayed by Sir Zaddock's acts of favourtism in giving jobs, business licences and loans to his blood relations at the expense of others (p.36). Sir Zaddock's nationhood is, therefore,

rooted in “otherness” instead of incorporating all the people into the national fold to validate itself as a nationhood that is truly working for everyone in the country. This tells us that during a dictatorship a nation-state is not a single community but that there is constant pushing and pulling between different and often competing ethnicities over the definition and character of the nation. Throughout the story, the objectives of these competing ethnicities threaten to tear the nation apart such as where Sir Zaddock’s followers are planning on arresting the village chief, a scenario that is likely to create more resentment amongst the people the chief leads as a traditional ruler.

Irony further manifests in the contrast between the dominant narrative that the president has developed the nation “beyond recognition” and the reality of the poor state of the transport system and scarcity of vehicles. Napolo, for example, walks on foot for three days to get to Sengo bus depot and he waits for the bus there which never comes for two weeks. If the country was indeed developed as Sir Zaddock’s government claimed, it would be easier to communicate and travel from one part of the country to another. In the same vein, poor social services in the fields of health and education show something different to what Sir Zaddock’s government is preaching. Kayira shows that this extreme dictatorship targeted everyone regardless of class or level of education. Through such depictions, Kayira is sure of capturing the suffering of the entire nation using Napolo’s experiences rather than a protagonist who is an educated, wealthy and well known politician with the means and ability to overthrow a government. Even members of the Youth Brigade themselves do not believe the positive images they disseminate about the state of affairs in the country. A good example is Paka, one of the leaders of the Young Brigade whose private comments regarding the poor state of the country’s roads while publicly touting the government’s achievements are self contradictory (p.145). Similarly, Jancha knows very well that Napolo is innocent since he knows nothing about national politics but he still holds him against his will and tries to

eliminate him. Through such portrayals Kayira is gesturing his ideological stance that condemns the dictatorship and suggests something different that would effectively harness universal values.

Parody is another form of humour that has been used in *The Detainee*. Interestingly, instead of only mocking the dictator and pillars of his rule, the author has also mocked the victims such as Napolo and Hona through dramatization of their torture which evokes the historical torture and murder of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's presumed political opponents some of whom were allegedly thrown in crocodile-infested rivers alive. Mockery of the dictatorship has also been reflected in instances where the so-called traitors are subjected to meaningless interrogations, detentions and verbal insults. It is also exposed in one incident where the Young Brigades are parading and dancing in hot sun which exposes their foolishness while children have gathered to watch (p.17, 29).

As regards surrealism, I observe that at the aesthetic level, surrealism creates beauty in the text by meticulously documenting the incidents which show the regime's extreme brutality or the foolishness of its backers. This is used while documenting Napolo's miraculous escape from his staged murder. Through that escape, the text is wrestling with a dominant narrative which stated that Dr Banda's rule was so powerful that no one could successfully undermine or challenge it. In that regard, Napolo's miraculous escape and survival subvert that discourse of greatness and invincibility surrounding Kamuzu Banda's regime as a way of dismissing discourses of greatness and invincibility of the nation-state as an idea. The act of throwing Napolo in the river by the security forces to be meat for crocodiles is exaggerated somewhat to echo this reality during the Banda's era as well as predict possible defeat of his regime in its schemes to remain in power forever which represents the possible demise of the nation-state as a dominant social reality in the wake of so many forces acting on it.

6.5 Tropes of Mobility as Tools for Imagining Internationality in *The Detainee*

Using tropes of mobility, Kayira is questioning the legitimacy of the Malawi nation-state as a collectivity under a dictatorship. He brings this aspect to the fore by exposing the movement of characters in and out of the country and also by highlighting the role of external bodies in challenging the legitimacy of the nation-state, hence its contestation. In this novel, Legson Kayira signals his post-nationalist thinking by depicting the Malawi nation as having clearly demarcated but open borders which are crossed time and again as a way of questioning the nation's boundaries and meaning. The boundaries of the nation that are crossed are not only physical but also racial and cultural or ideological.

On the physical level, the climax of the story is when Napolo crosses the international boundary to escape from Sir Zaddock's security agents who want to kill him. There are also several instances where the citizens of Malamoza, the fictitious country where the story is set, go outside the country to study or work. Characters like Chande, Hona and Sir Zaddock himself are products of western universities. It is also worth noting that the issue of colonial rule that, as the narrator reports, ended ten years ago is another indicator of physical mobility of westerners in and out of the country. Napolo's experiences in the town of Sengo that served as a regional headquarters during colonial rule unearth the history of the little town itself as a sign of the historical mobility between Africa and the West.

On the racial and cultural levels, Sir Zaddock is reported to have been knighted by the British Empire. This can be viewed as a sign of acceptance that the white people there regarded him as one of them but also as a sign of their continued influence in African affairs. The kind of greatness which characters like Sir Zoddock, Chande and Hona desire in form of knighthood, emperorship and the state presidency can be thought of as reflecting the universal (western) exercise of power and conceptualization of greatness different from the African conceptualization of the same. Hence, the act of honouring Sir Zaddock by the British empire

shows continued interference by the former colonizer in the affairs of the formerly colonized nation to the extent where Hona wonders whether Sir Zaddock "is indeed one of us or has been planted among us" (p.155). The general framework of the story shows that Kayira regards intervention or interference by the international community is a good thing in putting the African society on the right path. Generally, there is constant quest for internationalist ideals in the text and a lingering of several foreign aspects such as the city that casts a long shadow on the country's claim to independence. A city is a phenomenon that serves as a symbol of internationality and in the text it is observed that the role and place of the capital city, Banya in people's lives is prominent. For instance, even those characters living in rural areas such as Napolo are expected to visit the city for that is where jobs and life-saving resources are found and where important decisions that greatly impact people's everyday lives are made. The city is also significant in both Sir Zaddock and Hona's imagination of the nation since the text dismisses villages and the people who live there in its definition of the nation (p.75-78). Actually, Sir Zaddock's dictatorship is attempting to erase the rural from national imagination although the rural has traditionally being regarded as the key defining feature of the the county's national identity. In the text Napolo is slowly but surely losing his traditional identity as currently he can only be identified by the instruments of the nation-state which western modernity has created. He is presented as a subject of capitalist modernity who travels to the city to look for a white doctor to cure him rather than the traditional medicineman associated with village life. Again, instead of walking to the city straight away as a true traditionalist would do, Napolo waits for a bus for many days which never comes. He is slowly becoming conditioned by capital. The city of Banya too is presented as an instrument of modernity which is the centre of production and has become representative of the nation.

The tendency of embracing universal values and conceptualizations of collective existence has been felt throughout Africa's history in spite of its leaders' efforts to rebrand their nations as nativist constructs and to redefine them as distinct entities from those constructed through colonial experience. According to Frantz Fanon (1990:199), "the people's national consciousness is accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values because … it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. Such internationalism is not the privilege of a few". Interestingly, the act of embracing universal values as a prerequisite for internationalism has been at the centre of the struggle against dictatorships whether colonial or post-indepence. In the text we witness this struggle for respect for human rights as a desired definition of social organization and control being championed by those who have been exposed to western education, the international media and the ideals of global bodies such as the United Nations Organization. The influence from outside Malamoza is necessary to force the dictatorship to adhere to universal standards of human treatment and this influence can neither be deterred nor ignored. As such these universal values are terms on which Kayira would like the country to imagine itself.

As Schmitt (2005) has rightly observed, African countries have remained prey to the interference of external powers due to their tendency of departing from international norms and standards of dealing with the human subject. It is this departure from universal values and practices which frames Kayira's *The Detainee* as portraying external interference as a good thing until such a time when these countries will have acquired the necessary knowledge, values and expertise as members of the international community. His endorsement for external interference is registered through his constant criticism of Sir Zaddock's rule which lays bare those shortfalls in knowledge, values and practices that define internationality and in bringing in inspectors from the International Council of Churches to investigate human rights abuses in the country's detention centres (p.146).

The following conversation between Napolo and Hona echoes lack of genuine autonomy in Sir Zaddock's nationhood which, in Kayira's view, attracts external interference:

> "That's untrue. Since Sir Zaddock redeemed us is there anything in this country which we can't do by ourselves?"
>
> "We can't defend ourselves."
>
> "Mark my words," Napolo went on hurriedly. "When he has educated us a little more we shall be making our own cars and aeroplanes. Sir Zaddock is more clever (sic) than any white man." (p. 21).

From the conversation above, it emerges that unlike internationality, colonialism as a project requires African countries to imagine themselves as extensions of their colonizing nations as a historical reality while the conceptualization of social governance and control in internationality rests in the capacity of the individual society to determine its own affairs governed by universal values and respect for human rights. Using the above excerpt, therefore, *The Detainee* critiques nationhood constructed by the dictatorship as unsuitable and irrelevant to improving people's lives from an economic, technological and defence perspective, a scenario which also applies to all formerly colonized nations which are enjoying fake independence as there is political independence but without the corresponding economic and technological independence. To some characters like Hona, a society can only claim its place on the international stage if it has reached a level of autonomy which can only be realised if its economic and social systems are in line with the global norms and standards. Hona is imagining the kind of society that is beyond the nation-state but as a member of the international community.

With globalization as an emerging phenomen at the time the novel was published, it is widely understood that internationalism has become part and parcel of national imagination in Africa since African states have been lured into the global economy and global culture since the advent of colonialism. There is no questioning the fact that Malawi has been embedded in an international and geopolitical economy since independence such that she can no longer stand as an independent player "[f]or internationality implies global polity, global culture, adherence to international law, universalization and westernization" (Sassen, 2006:17). Such social realities have an impact on the nation's imagination. What is obtaining is that dictatorships are always trying to validate their membership to the international community but without success. In *The Detainee*, for example, by interfering in the country's internal affairs, Kayira is encouraging the Malamoza nation to imagine itself as a member of the international community whose aim is to bring about homogeneity in how nations across the globe are governed.

For almost all the characters except Napolo, the nation's development lies in its emulation of western ideals, definitions and models. In the text, Sir Zaddock, Hona, Chande and members of the Youth Brigade are all obsessed with the western form of nationhood such as form of governance, education and culture while Napolo is the only character who is concerned with subsistence farming and a life with his people in the village under the leadership of the village chief. This is a life characterized by local people's interactions with and guidance from the spirits of their ancestors. The text portrays Napolo as out of tune with what appears to be the dominant perception of the nation and national culture. He is not only estranged but also confused with no sign of recovery of his indigenous sense of nationhood in sight except by escaping into exile as he has done at the end of the story. Therefore, while on the one hand the nation-state represents progress in form of international connectedness of cities, transport

and communication systems and general infrastructure, on the other it robs people of their tribal identities as members of particular cultural groupings.

It must also be recognized that a nation is as political as it is economic. As an economic project, formal education plays a central role in actualizing such a project. In gesturing the nation's identity and aspirations towards internationality, Kayira has demonstrated that Malamoza, just like any other African nation, is run on western knowledge which has become universalised. As a way of highlighting the fact that the knowledge which is the driving force behind the modern Malawi nation is foreign, the text asserts that people who are considered really educated are only those who are educated outside the country. Hona, for example, says that he was educated in Cape Town (South Africa); Chande was educated at Arizona State University in the United States of America. Even the president himself, Sir Zaddock was educated in England and stayed there for many years afterwards. When such characters return from their studies abroad, they bring back ideas on how a nation ought to be organized and governed including such ideas as freedom and democracy, and even the concept of national development. Upon return, these characters assumed leadership roles in various public and private institutions which bear testimony that the country is indeed running on foreign knowledge and skills. However, Kayira's major concern is that African leaders do not put the knowledge imparted to them in western academies to good use. While the expectation is that such knowledge would greatly shape the formerly colonized nation's definition of honour, social organization and others, the larger picture is that it is failing to do so. Its success is little in transforming people's perceptions in a significant way as most followers of Sir Zaddock's dictatorship have been exposed to that education but are in the fore front violating the rules of good governance.

In terms of form, internationalism also manifests in the text through tropes of mobility whereby characters travel both locally and internationally. Mobility is herein used to question

the fixed nature of the country's nationhood created during the post-independence era in which the story is set. It is observed that there are several outings undertaken by characters to foreign countries to get further education in as much as foreigners too come into the country, Malamoza. From the outset of the novel, we witness mobility of the protagonist from the rural area trying to get to the city of Banya to seek medical assistance from a white doctor for his hernia problem. The city itself is a symbol of internationality since its way of life and the extent of its infrastructural development sharply depart from that of the rural (countryside) which according to Scandura and Thurson (2001) usually represents the nation. The journey motif, with its emphasis on the importance of western knowledge and technology, symbolizes general acceptance of such ideologies since colonial times by the African nation although there may be some resistance. Napolo undertakes that epic journey on foot following the failure of the bus to turn up and is reportedly picked up by Jancha in his vehicle, a Land Rover, another symbol of western modernity on which internationalism thrives. Later, foreign human rights inspectors fly into the country to investigate human rights abuses, a phenomenon which represents the widening scope of national imagination towards the global. The visit serves as the beginning of a potential socio-political transformation to democracy and internationalism since historically, pressure partly exerted by the international community led to Malawi's transformation from a dictatorship to multi-party democracy. The text makes it implicit that the characters that are jostling for power are all creations of what was initially colonial mobility since they are all products of western culture.

Further to that, throughout the novel, the idea of national progress is conveyed through the language of technology such as buses, frontiers, prisons and modern infrastructure such as roads, bridges and hospitals, and ideas such as democracy and human rights. One thing is certain: the traditional African society did not have prisons and formally marked borders but in the novel it seems the border and even the detention centres (prisons) are important spaces

for both locals and foreigners. The unreliability of the bus, the re-naming of old infrastructure such as bridges and the presence of numerous road blocks are an indication of stagnation in the country's development endeavours while the dominant narrative by the state is that the country has developed so much since independence. Napolo's act of crossing the international boundary into another country at the end of the story entails that national imagination can no longer be restricted to Malawi's territory. Through Napolo's act of crossing that international boundary to safety and freedom, Kayira depicts internationalism as a liberating and uniting force that would potentially bring about equality among all the people of Mamaloza by bringing them in line with universal values and conceptualizations of social organization and control. Hence the supposed heterogeneous national culture of the country is thereby presented as undergoing a process of re-definition.

In showing the complex nature of narrating the nation, this novel is both anti- and post-nationalist in its orientation as it sets out to confront the kind of nationhood created by the dictatorship that works against locally embedded identities and values which would ordinarily serve as the bedrock of nation imagination. In other words, transnational mobility of people, ideas and materials are featured in a manner that destabilizes the traditional and essentialist conceptualization of the Malawian nation. Such elements of mobility highlighted above cast *The Detainee* into what Tejumola Olaniyan (1995) terms post-Afrocentric realm which questions the excessive self-determination of Africans and seeks to undo the excessive Manichaenism of the Afrocentric nationalist discourse since the African nation is heterogeneous as it incorporates different voices. This is so because the text is also critical of the postcolonial nation formation besides criticizing the nativist nation and suggests an alternative mode of collective existence that focuses on respect for human rights and the interconnectedness and interdependability of nations and races which is also not done without questioning. This reflects ambivalence in Kayira's conceptualization of the nation.

Apart from tropes of mobility, the novel is infused with what Stephanie Newell (1996) has called ‘an aesthetic of doubt’ which creates room for alternative interpretations of national history, national identity and national territory. For instance, the characters waiting at Sengo bus stop keep on doubting if the bus will ever come; Napolo keeps on doubting if he will reach his destination and return to his family; if he has indeed been released or if he should trust any of the guards at the Snake Camp where he is detained (p.103). As regards national history, an aesthetic of doubt manifests in the manner in which the text re-historicizes the country’s past by privileging rumour over official historical accounts surrounding the background of the dictator, the colonial rule and the struggle for independence all of which are major events that act as pillars in shaping the country’s history and nationhood. The local people’s suppositions and the rumours they circulate about the dictator, or past events that are of national importance are where history is produced in opposition to official history created by the regime and imposed onto the masses. A good example is where doubts about the critical role which the dictator played in constructing the Malawi nation or its history are registered by Chief Rata. As far as Rata is concerned, there were other people who played a much more significant role in the pro-independence struggle than did Sir Zaddock but whose roles have since been erased by the dictatorship. These expressions of doubt are meant to register doubt in the country’s nationhood which suggests people’s search for an alternative nationhood or reality rather than the one currently obtaining that is presided over by the dictator. As regards doubts in national territory, the text ends as Napolo has crossed the international boundary which may be interpreted as implying that internationalism is the inevitable destination for the country in the wake of global forces at work. The incident casts doubt on the country’s capacity to continue being inward-looking and creates a pluralistic and ephemeral conception of national territory and nationhood generally.

6.6 Conclusion

The chapter has revealed that in *The Detainee* the author is concerned with the development of nationalism during the dictatorship of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda in which elements of nationhood such as national history, culture and sovereignty have been usurped. As such the text tries to both reconstruct and contest elements of nationhood that have been created for the people by the dictatorship. In order to achieve that task, the author has used an ordinary person as the space (mind and body) on which the clashes between the dictatorship and the people are played out both physically and ideologically. Napolo's personality and experiences at the hands of the state security elements reveal that while the dictatorship constructs the nation in monolithic terms, there exist other imaginings of the same nation in which Napolo would become a full and dignified citizen. In such imaginary nation Napolo's kind and culture would be modified and then incorporated into those that govern the international community. All these take place within the framework of the novel about dictatorship in which hyperbolic irony, satire, rumour, doubt, parody and the surreal serve as rhetorical devices that mock, expose, challenge, censure, disavow and denounce the usurpation of the nation's history, people's birth rights and national culture by the dictatorship which stands in between nation and the international community. This reveals the precariousness, fallibility and vulnerability of the country's nationhood under a dictatorship. The other section of this chapter has discussed how the novel constructs an internationalist image of the nation as Kayira's preferred alternative reality and he has constructed this vision through tropes of mobility and the role of international bodies in determining the affairs of the nation. The text suggests that these two alternative realities namely ideal nationhood which the dictatorship has unfortunately usurped and internationality could merge to form one definition of the nation based on the principle of universal values which both visions seek. Through such representations, the author has

subverted the dominant narratives of the nation for he has contested the strictly nativist imaginings of the Malawi nation as internationalism is shown to be a legitimate and therefore recognisable force in the process of the Malawi national imagination and construction more especially when the country is under dictatorship.

7.0 CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusions and Issues for Further Research

This study examined portrayals and commentaries on Malawian nationhood in Legson Kayira's fiction and life writing (autobiography) especially the portrayals of dominant discourses and counter-narratives of the Malawi nation as a means of asserting and sometimes questioning claims to collective identity, belonging to the land, national history and character. The study investigated how Legson Kayira has narrated the Malawi nation across the colonial and early post-independence eras through his novels and autobiography, and with the aim to highlight key questions and ideas about the country's nationhood which Kayira is raising and confronting. It built on the existing scholarship regarding politics of narrating the nation, and that of narrating the postcolonial African nation in particular in which writers confront the burning socio-political questions surrounding their countries' nationhoods. The literature reviewed stressed that every writer narrates the nation differently and this uniqueness begins with the selection of events of national significance and their interpretation, and is further reflected in the manner in which the writer uses those events to assert what he or she considers to be the state of the country's nationhood. The idea of the nation in the postcolonial African context and elsewhere is very unsettling and has been theorized in various ways such as primordialism, modernism, ethnosymbolism and postmodernism. Writers have conceived of their nations from these theoretical orientations and have represented them as contested spaces. Most writers have also suggested alternative realities and meanings of their nations that are in conflict with those constructed in official circles. Every nation is different in as far as it is a product of unique social factors and poses unique national questions or what Adams (2012) has called "the problematics of the nation" that feed into its character, imagination of its geographical space and identity as a nation. For Malawi these "problematics of the nation" include tribalism, in particular what Mphande (1996) has referred to as the "Chewaization of the nation", lack of patriotism, endemic

violence and patriarchal exploitation and oppression. In analyzing Kayira's constructions, I have tried to consider how western modernity with which the postcolonial Malawi nation has aligned itself and the lingering fragments of the country's ethnic background bear upon the collective imagination of the nation, identity and character during colonial times as well as after the country became independent.

Collectively, Legson Kayira's literary works provide a systematic representation of the development of nationalism in Malawi from colonial times to the post-independence era. My analysis has shown that Kayira's texts construct narratives and counter-narratives surrounding the country's nationhood and also raise certain questions about the country's nationhood. In some instances they provide alternative visions of Malawi's nationhood. In each of the literary texts analysed in this project, the country's nationhood and national experiences are presented through the experiences of the protagonist's tribe, local area or village to such an extent that the tribe's experiences shapes the readers' understanding of the country's national history, identity and character by staging its relationship with nation and world. In all the texts analyzed in this study, the tribe (local area or village) represents the nation allegorically and ironically in order to construct and in some cases undermine the dominant discourses of the nation respectively. For instance, Kayira questions the dominant Chewa-inspired construction of the Malawi nation which he over-rules as masking the true nature of the country's nationhood and character across his texts. He has done so through the experiences of villagers from the rural areas such as Chief Yotamu Mwenimuzi in *The Looming Shadow,* Napolo in *The Detainee*, Jingala in *Jingala,* Legson Kayira in *I Will Try* and Isabella in *The Civil Servant.* Kayira has demonstrated that their experiences encapsulate events that are significant to the creation, sustenance and contestation of the Malawi nation as he has used these figures to both construct and challenge the country's claims to nationhood. In that way, his constructions should be viewed as representing an attempt to revise and re-

create the country's nationhood elements such as citizenship, national identity, national character and others. I have argued that the tribe's relationship with the nation in Malawi and Africa as a whole is a problematic one as it reproduces and challenges nationhood at the same time by standing mytonymically and oppositionally to the manner in which the nation is imagined in terms of its history and character. Since we are dealing with literary texts, such imaginations have occurred most conspicuously in moments of crisis such as the chief's arrest and Matenda's sickness which trigger the performance of the witch-identifying ritual in *The Looming Shadow*. They have also manifested in Napolo's arrest which has sparked the intervention of his spirits of ancestors and the international human rights bodies in *The Detainee* and other crises. But Kayira has also demonstrated awareness that the country's nationhood is a product of global interactions, hence he has gestured to the construction of the Malawi nation towards internationalism starting with his autobiography, *I Will Try* all the way to his last literary text, *The Detainee* as people's imagination of the nation is heavily influenced by global migration and exchanges that promote universal values and construction of a common humanity. The construction of national identity and national consciousness, for example, takes into consideration people's historical migration to and connections with the outside world such as South Africa, the UK, USA, and neighbouring countries like Tanzania and Zambia, or is attributed to other global and supranational identities such as Christianity and Africanness. In this regard, Kayira's texts exhibit transnational interests that go beyond a strict focus on nation by situating elements of the country's nationhood in a global context and going beyond the nativist and racialized definitions of the post-independence Malawian nation. This echoes Paul Jay's (2010) assertion that nationalist narratives exhibit transnationalism by being restructured within a broader, more complicated historical and geographical context dominated by back and forth movements of people as a way of re-invisioning aspects of nationhood such as national identity, citizenship and national character

that go beyond the local. In my discussion of the construction of national territory, for example, I have shown that Kayira has named the nation's neighbouring countries but has also shown that the boundary between Malawi and these countries is either non-existent or physically and culturally crossed several times through international marriages, trade, inter-governmental business transactions and other exchanges as a way of disputing the country's geographical space. Suffice to say that Kayira sees the possibility of internationalism rather than nationalism in his writing as an inevitable outcome of the country's historical experiences.

Rhetorically speaking, Kayira has employed dreams, humour and the surreal in his texts as a way of revealing his alternative vision to the country's nationhood. These elements have been used as tools for critiquing the socio-political arrangement that has been constructed through the colonial and postcolonial processes within which the Malawi nation has been imagined and sustained. Some of these visions are yet to be fully realized. This scenario recognizes the fact that some of the visions of the nation Kayira is constructing cannot wholly replace the current nature of the country's nationhood although they may one day be realized since the nation is a process and not an entity. Nevertheless, they express his ideological stances on aspects of the country's nationhood by exposing the folly in them or depicting them in grotesque and absurd manner.

All in all, my discussion of Kayira's engagement with the dominant discourses surrounding the country's nationhood has revealed that Legson Kayira has engaged the following dominant discourses: that Malawi is a Christian nation; that Malawi is a nation for those tribes which have historically settled in the territory since time immemorial; that Malawians are united and peace-loving; and that Malawi is a nation for black people mostly of the Chewa ethnic background. Through both form and content, these dominant discourses have been dismissed and counter-narratives have been constructed such as: Malawi as a multi-

religious nation; Malawi as a nation of migrant tribes which moved into the land recently with no one old enough to claim absolute ownership of the nation; and Malawi as a violent and divided nation. In constructing the counter-discourses highlighted above and in line with Kayira's politics of narrating the nation, genre has played an important role. In particular, the autobiographic genre that has also utilized the portrait of a young man as an artist technique, the tragicomic novel of manner, and the novel about dictatorship have allowed Kayira to show among other things that the construction of the Malawi nation robbed the people of their real identities as inheritors of a particular heritage. This is achieved by creating a sense of inadequacy in their lives in which the journey and child motif that is pervasive in Kayira's texts represent the search for the ideal and alternative nation. For instance, with the help of the child and journey motif, these genres have allowed Kayira to critique the postcolonial Malawi nation in its current form in his quest for internationalism marked by universal values and respect for human rights in which the nation becomes a genuine member of the international community and as a nation for all the people regardless of their racial, religious, ethnic and other backgrounds. By so doing, Kayira envisions Malawi as a nation for all in spite of the fact that it has historically been constructed as a Chewa nation, something he views as unfortunate and as an error in history.

The uniqueness of this study lies in its systematic analysis of how an African writer from a minority tribe evokes nationalism to interrogate his country's claims to nationhood and show that the postcolonial African nation, although often wearing the image of the dominant tribe is a highly contested space to reveal that narrating a nation is a very complex exercise. Accordingly, Kayira who comes from a minority tribe, the Tumbuka tribe has shown how the construction of his country as "Malawi" and as "Mother Malawi" is both an assertion of the "Chewaization" of the nation and a construction of the nation as nurturing and accommodating for everybody who lives in it. Kayira's literary writings imply that the

Tumbuka can easily view the same nation as 'Father Malawi' because of their own patrilineal and patrilocal lineage they follow and that the myths, rituals and symbols that have been used to construct the nation are a representation of the narrow-mindedness of the formation of the Malawi nation for these ethnosymbolic elements are presented as dividing the nation. In his thinking, the act of constructing the nation, Malawi as a Chewa nation masks violence, tribalism, endemic suffering and patriarchal exploitation and oppression of the people drawn from and reflected in the Chewa mythology and rituals which continue to manifest in the character of the nation as residual elements. But the same woman image of the nation that Malawi 'wears' would positively mean that Malawi is a nation for all since a mother in the home takes care of all children including the non-biological children as long as they are members of the family. This is so because the nature of a woman is such that in the process of looking after her family she has traditionally persevered in unfortunate instances where she has been abused, abandoned and exploited.

In terms of contribution to knowledge, this study has highlighted how the tribe which is central to African definition and characterization of the nation is used by novelists to contruct and contest the nation and even claim internationality as an imagined vision of collective existence and social organization. It is envisaged that this study will also open up more revisionist scholarship on the project of narrating the Malawi nation following Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship and the subsequent changes that came with multi-party politics in 1994 and after.

This thesis suggests a number of areas for future research that directly arise from it as follows: Although this study has highlighted the internationalist thrust of Kayira's imagination of the nation, that reality in most nation-states is opposed to the "planetarity" vision as propounded by Gayatri Spivak (1999, 2005) in which nations are slowly but surely consolidating their unique characters and identities rather than being characterized by

homogeneity with the international as an imagined vision of globalization. In her submission, planetarity recognizes difference without regarding it as a threat to social organization while globalization looks at it as such. This is an area which merits further research because most postcolonial nations are yet to consolidate their statuses as nations. They are still in the process of becoming nations and could, therefore, be swayed in whichever direction depending on the intensity of the forces acting on them. As such, the proposed enquiry would have to consider how these upcoming nations are narrated within the context of planetarity where consolidation of their unique identities and characters would entail consolidation of their ethnic identities and characteristics that intensify tribal competition over the definition of the country's nationhood. In Malawi currently, almost all the major tribes such as the Chewa, Lomwe, Yao, Ngoni and Tumbuka have each formed a heritage association and these associations are greatly influencing the politics and imagination of the nation which in turn are affecting the country's nationhood. Secondly, Kayira's gender and ethnic background may have influenced the manner in which he has narrated the Malawi nation as reflected in his rather subjective selection of historical events and his hostile engagement with the Chewa nationalism that has come to define the character of the Malawi nation. Being a Tumbuka from the northern region which naturally happens to be a rival tribe to the dominant Chewa ethnic group, Kayira considers the Chewa ethnic origins of the Malawi nation as an error in history. He holds that construction responsible for some of "the problematics of the nation" such as endemic violence which stems from the deeply embedded violence of the 'Nyau' cult and 'mwavi' drinking practices of the Chewa tribe being inscribed on the nation. He has also highlighted lack of patriotism among Malawians as another problematic of the nation represented through abandonment of one's home and family which is reminiscent of the 'chikamwini' marriage system of the Chewa where men leave their homes anyhow leading to their wanderer life and family abandonment. Kayira has also tackled the problem of

patriarchal exploitation but he has conspicuously ignored the land question in his texts due to the same tribal and regional background of his. When colonialists opened tea estates taking a greater part of the southern region, a lot of local people there lost their land. The problem of land shortage where people can build or grow their crops has reached alarming levels in the southern region. But Kayira comes from the northern region where such deprivations did not take place and where the problem of land shortage is not felt. Therefore, there is need for another researcher to look into politics of narrating the Malawi nation by a writer from a matrilineal society such as Chewa or Lomwe from the southern region. Such a writer may confront other problematics of the nation or may depict the nation very differently from Kayira's narration. Thirdly, Kayira's literary writing span over colonial and early post-indepence era's of Malawi with his latest work being *The Detainee* that was published in 1974. Since then, there have been a series of events of national significance such as the change from one party system to multiparty democracy, the re-awakening of tribal consciousness already alluded to and calls for decentralization, federalism and even secession by certain quarters of the country just to mention a few that have raised new questions about the country's nationhood. It would therefore be interesting if another researcher looked into how the Malawi nation has been imagined since the early 1990s when the country became a multi-party democracy. There are indications that a lot has changed in terms of people's perception of national identity, culture, citizenship and patriotism, and new problematics of the nation have emerged since then hence a new study is warranted.

Finally, for another researcher interested in Legson Kayira's literary texts, he or she can look into the relationship between the nation and the state for it has implications for Kayira's imaginings of Malawian nationhood. It would, therefore, be useful to look into the implicatedness of the state in Kayira's imaginings of Malawian nationhood.

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