The Art of Narrating Pain in Margaret Ogola's *Place of Destiny*

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Abstract

This paper examines how Margaret Ogola narrates pain and suffering in her novel, *Place of Destiny*. I am persuaded that literature being a discursive subject which serves as a mediating force in the society, Ogola uses this art form to reflect deeply on the manifestation of pain in human existence. I argue that the first person narrative voice is a powerful tool of narrating individuals' pain in this novel and that the writer creates characters who experience and narrate pain from a myriad of perspectives thus giving a holistic approach to the understanding of pain.

Key words: ***Ogola, Pain, Narrative, Death, bereavement***

Introduction

The cataphoric opening statement in *Place of Destiny* sets the tone for a narrative of pain: "She was only sixteen, perhaps seventeen, but she was heavy with child and with deep unhappiness" (9). The identity of this character is not revealed until much later in the narrative and the constant reference to her as just 'the girl' not only creates and sustains suspense but it also makes her a symbolic representation of pain and suffering. The explicit foregrounding of her age – only sixteen – is a strategy of appealing to the reader's empathy and a provocation to denounce the kind of painful circumstances that "the girl" finds herself in courtesy of the adults around her.

Ogola highlights the irony that, while the young girl and the father of her child, not much older than her, are willing to take responsibility for their actions, the adults around them act irrationally. The school authorities expel the young girl from school; her father treats her wickedly; her mother does not protect her from her father's abusive treatment; and her aunt exploits her. It is ironic that the girl's father mistreats her for what he sees as bringing "shame to their illustrious and moneyed name" (10) yet he is well known for being a 'sugar daddy'. A father is often seen as the symbol of

protection but this girl's father treats her so badly that she is forced to leave her home to go live in the slums, often sleeping hungry so that her young baby can eat.

Narrating the young girl's painful experiences after she gets pregnant allows Ogola to examine the place of family in nurturing its members. The girl does not receive any support from her mother because she too is extremely afraid of the father, who seems to run this family with an iron fist. Ogola describes the father as "the ultimate despot, the absolute and unquestioned monarch" and the mother as "a timid mouse at the periphery of existence whose use had ended with her capacity to bear children" (11). The girl's experiences are thus narrated against a background of a cruel and chauvinistic father and an oppressed mother. By the time she is running away from home, therefore, she is bereft of any other options and she walks away covered in a cloak of pain. Her aunt, who the girl hopes will offer comfort away from home, not only overworks her but refuses to watch over her baby so that she can continue with her schooling. This aunt and the girl's parents represent forces of oppression and are a reflection of how families can contribute to the destruction of an individual member. Ironically, the mother and the aunt are women and should have been more sympathetic to the girl's situation. Unfortunately, their failure to support the girl forces her to turn to prostitution to support her child. The girl is eventually murdered, supposedly by one of her clients, and her son ends up as a street child before being rescued, taken to school and ending up as a respected doctor.

Ogola's *Place of Destiny* is a narrative of pain – both physical and psychological. The protagonist, Amor Lore, is diagnosed with cancer of the liver months before she celebrates her fiftieth birthday. The narrative tells the story of Amor and her family and colleagues as she battles the physical pain caused by cancer and the psychological torture of thinking about her own death. Her family and colleagues are in pain, too, as they watch the person they love struggle with a painful disease and the thought of having to live without her after her imminent demise.

Ogola died in 2011 after suffering from cancer. There is a way in which we read *Place of Destiny* as the author's effort to "imagine, invent, and rewrite a different collective and personal history for the protagonist" (Francoise Lionnet 25) because Amor seems to be the author's alter ego. The story of Amor is a kind of re-presentation of Ogola's experience with pain. The creation of different characters close to Amor and the narration of their experiences in the first person point

of view helps to create artistic distance between the author and the narrative and therefore allows her to deal with the burden of narrating painful experiences.

Narrating Pain

The story in *Place of Destiny* comes to us through an amalgamation of various voices. Ogola gives us a third person narrative voice at the beginning of the story but the rest of the narrative is told by ten different first person narrators. These multiple narrative voices make this novel unique in the sense that each main character gets to tell their story in their own words. Through the first person narrative voice Ogola gives pain a personal touch so that each character describes their pain the best way they know how. There is, therefore, a sense in which, reading each narrator's account, the reader feels like they are involved in a kind of therapy session with the narrator. This kind of engagement is important because it allows for the evocation of empathy in readers. Chinua Achebe observes in "The Truth of Fiction" that empathy is one's ability to get under the skin of another human being such that as readers we imaginatively identify with the pain suffered by the characters in *Place of Destiny*. By the end of the narrative readers feel that they "have had a sense of genuine participation in [the narrators'] experiences even though [readers] only identify with [the characters] mentally and not physically (Muchiri 156). In addition, the first person narrative voice creates a sense of immediacy in the interaction between the reader and the narrator, allows narrators to confide in the reader and therefore creates a sense of intimacy, and enables readers to have a peek into the narrator's stream of consciousness.

The first I-narrator in this narrative is Amor, the protagonist. She introduces us to herself and through foreshadowing indicates that she is going through a rough time when she talks about having a "besieged mind" (16) and has to deal with "the pressing problem of my imminent demise" (17). We see Amor taking stock of her life through introspect and retrospect and her confidence comes through when she says, "I must confess that I have had a good life" (17). It is not until later in the story that we get to know that the cause of her besieged mind and her thoughts about life and death is that she is suffering from cancer. As she sits in her office, she takes time to think about her life, work, family, and what she has achieved over the years. In addition she recalls her childhood and realises that she has always been independent and observant. For instance, she

remembers that she noticed a gendered division of labour when she was little and, even then, questioned why women got to do most of the manual work while the men just lazed about.

Looking back, she is happy with herself for having managed to set up and run a successful business while raising a family at the same time. She does not paint her life as perfect though; she admits that she has had her fair share of pain, disappointment and failure. In addition, she confesses that her realisation of happiness comes from facing life with courage but accepting the degree of fear that sometimes accompanies life. However, faced with cancer and the pain that comes with it, Amor confides in the reader that she is "afraid of the possibility of prolonged uncontrollable agony" (20). Amor does not want her family and employees to see her in pain or recognise her fear. Through the first person narrative voice, however, she comfortably shares her fear with the reader. She considers herself a strong-willed woman and believes that she inherited this trait from her mother. The idea of female writers and/or protagonists identifying with their mothers is common in African narratives by and about women.

The first person narrator speaks in progressive tense, a style that Ogola uses throughout the novel. This tense creates a sense of the here and now so that the reader empathises with the narrator with a kind of immediacy and urgency. When Amor is talking about the doctor feeling her stomach, being sent for imaging or about her pain, the progressive tense allows the reader to visualise and feel these events, albeit imaginatively. In addition, the tense allows the narrator to carry the reader along as they navigate this journey of pain and imminent death. Amor's courage and desire to protect her family from the reality of the gravity of her illness come through when she is disclosing her illness to her husband:

> I'm not well Gherry. There's something wrong with my liver. I have to go to hospital tomorrow. I would have gone, but when you called and said you were coming in today, I decided a little delay couldn't hurt much to Dr Bargirei's disgust of course…. They suspect cancer. (30)

Although Amor is anxious and fears for her life, she downplays the gravity of the illness for the benefit of her husband. This act reveals her to be loving and considerate in spite of her pain.

When Amor receives the test results confirming her illness, the doctor informs her that her cancer is advanced and inoperable. As if to underscore the seriousness of the situation, she switches to

medical register to tell us the name of her disease – hepatocellular carcinoma. What is striking about Amor at this moment is that rather than start by telling us how she feels after receiving this news, she only says, "I can see that Gherry is deeply wounded" (31). Her ability to notice others' pain and suppress hers endears her to the reader and her compassion and empathy for others evoke our empathy for her. Amor's reaction in a way reflects how human beings respond to the pain of grave news. She decides to go to her office instead of staying at home, physical movement which is, subconsciously, a strategy of trying to move away from the pain. Trying to work in the office as if everything is normal is a kind of denial, a common reaction to bad situations – she has only a few months to live.

Through the character of Amor, Ogola examines how humans respond to issues regarding illness and death. Amor reveals that as an enlightened woman she has acted against tribal traditional beliefs on death and written a will, not because she knew she was about to die, but as part of her inclination to order. Amor's revelation of her will is Ogola's way of demonstrating the need for one to put their affairs in order when they are alive. She shows that there is nothing wrong with preparing a will, contrary to many people's belief that writing a will is tantamount to wishing death for oneself.

The first person narrative voice allows us to see Amor's internal thoughts and the conflict she experiences as she thinks about her illness: "Who I am and why, if for any purpose, have I had a share in the grace of existence. Why I have been allowed to pass this way" (33). There is a sense in which, faced with death, human beings begin to seek understanding of their own existence and the meaning of life – and death. Amor's thoughts and questions about her life are Ogola's way of provoking the readers to think about death, a real and expected finality of human life which people tend to fear and therefore avoid thinking about and planning for.

Even in the midst of pain, Amor has a sense of humour. Describing how her fourteen-year-old twins, Hawi and Pala, come out of the house excitedly when she arrives home, she refers to them as "Ecstasy" and "Anguish" to capture their personalities. Her children and husband give her the love and comfort of family which she needs at this moment of her life. As a mother, apart from the cancer that ails her, she has to suffer the pain of having a son who suffers from mild cerebral palsy. Pala, whom she fondly calls "Anguish" has cerebral palsy and Amor and the rest of the

family have had to learn to deal with his terrible temper. She reveals her humourous side again when she says that Pala tries to disguise his awkward gait with an exaggerated swagger.

Amor's illness does not detract from her ability to empathise with others' pain. Her concern for her husband's pain is evident throughout the narrative as she keeps noticing that he is hurting and she confesses that she is "consumed with pity for him almost as if [she is] personally responsible for being afflicted with cancer" (43). It is ironic that Amor is the one pitying her husband yet she is the one suffering from cancer and facing death. Ogola creates this character to demonstrate that when an incurable or chronic illness strikes a person, the pain is felt beyond the sick individual. Amor's thoughts about the effect of her illness and eventual death serve to demonstrate how such illness affect families and individuals:

> I can't leave him, I think wildly to myself. How will he manage by himself? Please God you can't do this to me, there are too many other people involved! …I find the thought of leaving him alone with Pala's moods or even Hawi's endless need for demonstrative affection agonizing. The older girls also still have some grave transitions to make and will need guidance to help them negotiate their way. (43-44)

These thoughts, confided in the reader by Amor through the first person narrative voice, reveal Amor's personality at various levels – as a woman, mother and wife. As a woman, she is inclined to worry, selflessly, about the welfare of those around her; as a mother she is deeply concerned about how her children will navigate the maze that is life without their mother's guidance; and as a wife she is certain that her husband cannot cope with the 'wifely' duties of taking care of children, particularly teenagers. Amor is so selfless that while she confides in readers that she is afraid of pain, she hides this fear from her husband because, according to her, he is already distressed enough. Instead, she presents a courageous front by telling Mwaghera that she is not so much afraid of dying as she is of leaving him alone.

In a chapter titled "A Stroll by Elementaita" Ogola sets the beauty and calming effect of nature as the background for deep reflections on pain, death and dying. During a holiday with Mwaghera, which they have taken despite a busy schedule, Amor tries to understand what is happening to her life. Ogola makes Amor ask herself a series of rhetorical questions regarding death in a bid to

understand it and to demonstrate the kind of mental and psychological anguish she is going through:

> We die anyway, so why are we not at peace with it? Is it perhaps fear of loss of the personal self – to not be? But what is this to be that makes a human being so cling to life? Is life real or is it illusory as some philosophers claim? Is it merely sensual awareness – the sunshine on your skin, the wind in your face, the orgasmogenic triumvirate of sex, money and power? What is the purpose of my being, of my having been? (50-51)

Through the above questions Amor reflects on religion as she seeks answers to the questions about life and death and realises that even religion does not offer her the truth she seeks. She thinks about various cultures and how different peoples relate to death and realises that people generally fear death and that the traditions of various communities regarding death can attest to this.

Amor's discussion with Mwaghera about her death indicates that she has accepted the reality of her death and although she admits that it is not easy to claim courage in such circumstances, she comes through as courageous. She insists on talking about her illness and dying even though Mwaghera has been avoiding such thought. Through dialogue, Mwaghera's words confirm what Amor has been saying about his helplessness: "Dearest, I can't come to terms with the fact that you won't be by my side till the end. What will my life be without you?"(52). Ogola employs dialogue as a strategy for complementing and countering possible biases in the first person narrator. Mwaghera's words reveal his pain and a sense of helplessness and desperation in the face of his wife's imminent death. Their discussion underscores Ogola's belief that it is important to speak about pain and death as this helps one to face and deal with the reality.

Speaking acts as a kind of therapy and it helps the affected accept the inevitability of pain and death. The doctors' diagnosis of Amor's cancer and the imminent death stirs up feelings of anger and fear not only in her but in her family and colleagues as well. These feelings are natural human reactions to news of chronic illness and death and Ogola ensures that the characters behave in a credible and consistent manner after receiving the news. The characters' reaction demonstrates:

> Human helplessness in the face of the omnipotence of death in its choice of person and time. This helplessness is the root of the fear of death as well as anger at and anxiety over

> death [and a recognition that] death is not only inevitable and indiscriminate but also unpredictable and incomprehensible. (Muchugu Kiiru 2007:71)

Ogola alludes to various places in Kenya such as Lake Elementaita, Lake Nakuru, Gilgil, Tsavo, and Maasai Mara and intertwines them with a story about pain, suffering and death to demonstrate the reality of death. In addition she juxtaposes the beauty of nature with the pain of illness and thoughts about death to demonstrate that pain and death are part of human life. Ogola's artistic presentation of the concept of death, dying and bereavement is, in a way, a demonstration of the fact that death is "a reality of current existence" (Kiiru 2014: 303). At the height of her pain, Amor imagines that she is a small child and cries out to her mother to help relieve her pain. Her mother's words to her, though spoken in a dream, serve to show that there are certain painful situations that humans have no control over, such as death. Amor's mother says, "Not everything has medicine, child," (59) indicating the finality of death and man's powerlessness in the face of death.

Amor gathers a lot of courage to inform her children about her illness. She reasons that it is her responsibility as their mother, and the one who is dying, to break the news to them as gently as only a mother can. At this point Amor carries the burden of pain at two levels – her own physical and psychological pain and that of her children when they eventually discover that their mother could die any time. Using the metaphor of a hen gathering her chicks, Amor sits her children down and calmly reveals her condition to them. Having to tell her children that she is dying seems to be even more painful than the actual physical pain. Amor tries, for the sake of her children, to put on a courageous front and even injects some humour to lessen the gravity of the situation: "…as Dad has told you, there is a heaven and I am already having some very serious discussions with God to see how I can get there. … Always I'll be very close to you even if you can't actually see me" (95). Amor knows very well that her words must sound empty in the ears of her children, considering the news she has just shared, but as a mother she has to reassure them of her love and give them an illusion of hope, however feeble. She reasons that it is her responsibility to make her last days easy for her family:

> The people gathered around this table are the most important to me, the only ones that really fall under my immediate sphere of influence. It will be my choice to make my dying either a tragedy, which leaves everybody feeling diminished and guilty, or a loving leave-

> taking that will be remembered and treasured – a source of strength in times of trouble. Else what is a mother for?

Amor's words reveal her compassionate nature. She momentarily shelves her own pain to try and ameliorate the pain of her family.

The children respond to their mother's news with worry, confusion, pain, and even anger. They all try to understand death, illness, and human suffering but they have no answers. Ogola concretises Amor's place as the stability of this family to show how her demise will cause certain emotional disintegration. Even in her illness, Amor is able to console her children while her husband only watches helplessly. Through direct speech, Mwaghera demonstrates Amor's strength and courage saying, "You handled that very well my love. I'm sorry I wasn't able to help. I'm still out of my depths with this whole business." (97). Mwaghera's claim of his own confusion and helplessness complements what Amor has already said about his devastated spirit since he learnt of her illness. Amor's decision to inform her children of her impending death and to visit the hospice are indicators that she is coming to terms with her own and others' mortality.

As Amor's illness progresses and her death draws near, Ogola uses her character to explore the thoughts that one gets when they are in great pain and facing death. Amor becomes more philosophical as she tries to understand and accept her condition:

> I have greater understanding and acceptance of both the greatness to which human beings can rise and the baseness to which they can sink.… We are sometimes capable of great courage and at other times of craven cowardice; of great nobility and of utter selfishness; of great love and of feral cruelty. (114)

Through Amor's stream of consciousness, Ogola examines the very foundation of human nature and demonstrates that in the absence of pain or imminent danger, human beings seldom pause to think about the values of being human. Amor appreciates the love and support of her family and friends in her journey of pain. Through her, Ogola demonstrates the need for family support and that from other quarters when one is suffering from a life-threatening illness such as cancer. Amor indicates that in her condition, the support she needs is as simple as sitting by her side silently, "a little pressure of the hand, a gentle touch on the cheek, some tears of commiseration" (115) since

these are signs of affection. Ogola thus demonstrates that in the face of great pain, what one needs most is the love of those around her.

Ogola examines the role of religion in helping human beings understand and deal with human suffering. Amor has not been very religious but towards the end she seeks a religious interpretation to her pain. Her husband and children are religious but when Amor falls ill they question the belief that God is just. Indeed, Pala declares openly that he has stopped believing in God while Mwaghera, according to Amor, also seems angry with God. Amor seeks spiritual guidance from Fr. Isidore Gaya, a Catholic priest, who becomes part of her support team as she nears her death. Fr. Gaya's close relationship with Amor allows her to reflect on the grave issues of life, human suffering and death. Fr. Gaya's discussions with Amor enable Ogola to demonstrate that although human beings tend to turn to religion for answers to difficult questions regarding human existence, not even religion can convincingly explain human mortality. Apart from offering spiritual guidance to Amor, Fr. Gaya gives her a much needed sense of humour. He says, for instance,

> In my view heaven is an expensive place for expensive souls, but of course this is only my opinion – I have yet to go there. … Believe me, heaven will be a shock for many people who aspire to get there. They will take one frightened look and then just quietly creep off to their brown boring corner. (117)

His words give Amor a sense of distraction from thoughts of pain and death. In addition, through him, Ogola warns against blind following of religion without seeking to understand its fundamental value for humankind and shows that religion need not be dogmatic.

The sessions that Amor has with Fr. Gaya in convince her that the faith and belief he has in God as a Christian enable him to look at life differently from the way she does. She becomes a believer too and as such she "has no reason to resist death with anger or fear because, being a rite of passage, death is anticipated" (Kiiru 2014: 304). Her acceptance of her condition enables Amor to encourage her husband and children such that despite the pain of losing her, they accept the reality with peace of mind. Alone on her sick bed, Amor realises how often human beings are under pressure from the demands of family, work and other engagements to appreciate the simple yet beautiful things about their surroundings. She realises how illness jolts one to the reality of life and by denying them simple pleasures: "Life is so beautiful. I wish I had stopped more to just

admire it all" (117). Ogola employs Amor's internal thoughts to demonstrate that one should take time to appreciate the small things because when disaster strikes one realises that they have very little time or energy to take in the pleasure of what is around them. She shows that in addition to the physical pain, the sick person feels a great sense of loneliness. Perhaps Amor's acceptance of her painful condition is what allows her to die peacefully in her sleep. Due to the limited nature of first person narrator, Amor's death is reported by Dr Igana, her doctor and a close friend of the family.

Through Amor, Ogola creates a strong female character, a wife, mother and employer whose independence and courage are evident even at the height of her illness. She momentarily forgets that she is the one in pain and starts to encourage her family and colleagues. She has the courage to talk to her husband about the importance of remarrying after her demise, she has the sense of responsibility and wisdom to play matchmaker between Lanoi and Ithoth, and is able to discern the growing affection between Imani and Igana. The symbolic representation of Amor as a strong character until her last days points to Ogola's conviction about the central responsibility of women in the family and the society at large. Amor's husband feels so lost after her illness and the eventual death that he has to physically move from his home to another country to rediscover himself. In many cultures the woman is the natural and foremost caregiver and nurturer for her family. In this novel, therefore, Ogola demonstrates how difficult others find it when roles are reversed and the woman is the one who needs round the clock care from those around her. As a mother, wife and employer, Amor ensures that she runs her family and business in an orderly manner and maintains this sense of order right until the last minute of her life.

Complementary Narrative Voices

The second I-narrator in *Place of Destiny* is Lanoi Sompesha, one of Amor's most trusted employees in her company. Lanoi's voice is important in this narrative because it not only complements and corroborates Amor's voice, but it also reveals the side of Amor which the latter might not have narrated. In addition, Lanoi narrates Amor's story from the point of view of an employee, who may not be biased as compared to, say, Amor's family members.

Lanoi begins her narrative by talking about Amor. She corroborates what Amor had said about her strict work ethic:

> My boss Amor A. Lore is a very demanding woman with an eagle's eye for mediocrity and slackness which she generally deals with summarily. Yet she is quick to give praise, and to be trusted by her is highest accolade to any employee…. She knows how to listen to others, to take into account intelligent suggestions and not be threatened by other people's abilities. (35)

Lanoi paints Amor as diligent and kind and even confides in the reader that she holds Amor in awe, as "a mentor, a guide, an act to study and imitate" (40). Lanoi's description of Amor in a way foreshadows the pain that Amor later experiences and suggests Lanoi's feeling that such good people should not suffer.

Ogola employs Lanoi's voice to address social ills outside physical pain. Before Lanoi joined Amor's company, she resigned from another job to escape the indecent advances of her immediate boss. Lanoi's experience is Ogola's way of narrating the reality of dystopia where an industrious young woman's career is almost destroyed by an amorous employer. Ogola paints Amor as a voice of reason and a symbol of the good that exists amidst evil. She not only offers Lanoi a job and an opportunity to utilise her skills, she also pays for her to acquire post-graduate qualifications. To maintain the credibility of the first person narrative voice, Ogola brings in Lanoi to talk about the positive attributes of Amor. The latter comes through as not only passionate about and organised in her work but as very considerate and kind to her employees. She is so likable and free with her employees that she even plays matchmaker between Lanoi and Ithoth and they eventually end up getting married. Lanoi, therefore, acts as the voice of Amor's employees at the company and describes the pain they feel at having to lose such a wonderful employer. They may not be part of her family, but their pain is just as deep and they form part of the support system for Amor in her last days.

The third I-narrator is Pala, Amor's only son. We meet Pala when he is fourteen. Through Pala, Ogola gives us the perspective of a child in dealing with pain. Pala's narration begins by demonstrating the innocence of children and the immense and unquestionable trust which they put in their parents:

> I'm one lucky boy. My mother has repeated this to me many times – right from the day I arrived home from hospital with my head squashed into the shape of an *embe dodo* because of birth trauma. If she says I'm lucky then it must be true. (46)

Pala suffers from mild cerebral palsy and he has had to face a myriad of challenges, including being beaten and having his limbs broken by other boys in school for always coming on top of his class. However, Pala does not let his physical condition detract from his ambitions and he can even afford a sense of humour:

> I suffered brain damage at birth [but] it did not affect my intelligence to any significant degree. I am quite bright though sometimes I like to tell myself that I would have been an absolute genius if I had not had such a tough time being born, a process I am assured is normally quite straight-forward. Even my twin sister, who does not have any brain worth talking about, apparently got through it without much effort. Ah well, a chap can't excel at everything. (46)

Pala's sense of humour is part of Ogola's way of creating comic relief while narrating a story of pain. Pala's cerebral condition is not easy for him or his family but his easy demeanour makes reading this narrative easy and offers a kind of therapy for both the narrator and the reader. His childlike narration of his ambition to join his mother in business demonstrates the courage of a young boy who refuses to be put down by his physical condition. In addition, his words complement the voices of his mother and sister who, separately, describe Pala as a sort of genius. Pala believes that he and his mother "will make a formidable team" (48), words which serve as a kind of foreshadowing for the pain he will suffer later on when he learns that he will never have a chance to work with his mother.

The voice of a child enables Ogola to explore the pain of losing a parent especially a mother, and the sense of loss, disorientation and hopelessness that such a child faces. Ogola, through Pala, demonstrates that pain and human suffering do not spare anyone regardless of their age. Pala has to deal with both his physical condition of cerebral palsy and the psychological pain of losing a mother. Pala, after the burial of his mother, says, "I am beginning to realise that sorrow is the one true and most common denominator of human existence. I know that I am now an initiated member of that in-exclusive club. I have come of age" (158). These words, uttered by a child, yet carrying

such wisdom, not only confirm what Amor and Hawi have said about Pala being intelligent, but they also reveal that pain and suffering give one a kind of experience that surpasses their age. The death of a parent requires one to grow up and that is why Pala says that he has come of age despite being only fourteen. Pala is overcome by pain after burying his mother. Since his entire family is grieving, and being both a child and a first person narrator, he can only seek comfort from the reader by sharing his feelings: "My heart is bursting with pain and I wish I could weep, but I can't seem to remember how" (157).

Pala also offers Igana, Amor's doctor, an opportunity to relieve part of the burden he carries regarding his background. It is to Pala, a child, that Igana breaks the news about his past as a street child. Ogola allows Pala to get encouragement from Igana by hearing the latter's story while at the same time demonstrating that each of the characters in this novel suffers in one way or another. There is a sense in which sharing his pain with a child allows Igana to express his suffering without the fear of being judged as may happen in the case of adults.

Through Pala, Ogola demonstrates that while pain and suffering are part of human existence, one can still have a fulfilling life. At seventeen, Pala considers himself a man and is already working and pursuing a degree. His achievements and positive attitude demonstrate the need to be optimistic in spite of one's challenges. Pala exhibits a maturity that is impressive for a seventeen-year-old. He confesses that he still experiences acute pain at the loss of his mother despite three years having lapsed but reasons that life has to go on. He even considers having a "man-to-man talk" (166) with his father to impress on him the need to get another woman to offer him companionship. This is a sign that Pala has accepted his mother's death and a demonstration that pain and human suffering are not permanent.

Pala's energetic approach to life after his mother's death corroborates T. Lake's argument in *Living with Grief* that while death is an "inevitable finality of our lives" (1) bereavement "renews all the purposes of our lives" (2). It is as if Pala is doing all he can to make his mother proud of him even in her absence. Ogola thus communicates her thoughts and philosophy about pain through the voice of a child. We associate children with innocence and therefore can trust them. In this sense, Ogola implicitly challenges the reader to learn to move beyond pain by presenting

an example of a child who has learnt to move on and even has a sense of humour. Readers are, therefore, bound to respond to this lesson positively since it is spoken by a child.

The fourth I-narrator is Hawi, Pala's twin sister. Hawi is created as a foil to Pala and her actions and words confirm what Amor and Hawi have said about her being 'the baby of the house' and excessively dependent. Her childlike innocence comes through right at the start of her narration when she declares "I'll marry someone exactly like Daddy" (55). Hawi's voice complements those of the other first-person narrators. For instance, she corroborates what Amor and Pala say about the latter's capabilities, "Pala knows everything. He has a photographic memory and is a walking encyclopedia, dictionary and atlas combined" (56).

While Pala, in spite of his physical condition, is independent, Hawi is still dependent and childishly selfish. Ogola creates Hawi's character to demonstrate how differently people respond to similar situations and, therefore, how differently people deal with pain. When Amor and Mwaghera take a trip to Elementaita, Hawi is unhappy that they are going without her and she confides in the reader that, "I must make Daddy pay for this. I'll make him feel very guilty" (56). Hawi may be a child and is not aware that her mother is very ill but her reaction demonstrates that children are not always as innocent as they seem. Hawi is aware that her mother is not easy to blackmail so she settles on the easier target – her father.

Hawi's demeanour is the exact opposite of Pala's and readers can begin to understand why Amor is worried about leaving the teenager at her age. Yet, just like Pala, Hawi matures very fast after her mother's death. She joins her siblings in supporting their father to move on by getting him a female companion. Accepting the death of a loved one is difficult but through Hawi's voice Ogola reiterates the importance of moving on after a heavy blow. Hawi states categorically, "He [her father] deserves the best and, let's face it, Mama is dead and all of us just have to get on with our lives the best we can" (161).

Through Hawi, Ogola addresses the issue of preparing for eventualities such as death. Hawi explains that her mother had bought some company shares in her children's names and taken out insurance covers which are now partly paying for the children's education. Ogola may not want to seem prescriptive of how one should prepare for the possibility of early death so she employs the

voice of the child to 'testify' how her mother's foresight has helped the family even in Amor's absence.

At seventeen, Hawi is still a child and does not pretend that she has totally overcome her mother's death. She confesses, "I miss Mama and the peaceful innocence of the old days… In such a short space of time our lives turned completely upside down…" (163). Like Pala, Hawi has had to mature in the absence of her mother and realise that there is more to life than having pretty dresses. She is so changed that she shares with the reader her disbelief about having "a real human being who toddles towards [her] when [she] gets home from school" (161). Having a niece contributes to Hawi's growing up since she now has somebody who needs to be taken care of and Hawi has to be responsible. The little girl, Amor, is symbolic of the continuity of life even after the death of a loved one. Her birth to Imani and Igana and her being named after the elder Amor, the protagonist, is symbolic of hope and an indication that while death marks the end of one life, the living must carry on. The quick growing up that Hawi and Pala undergo after their mother's death is Ogola's way of demonstrating how pain, suffering and death destroy the innocence of children. The two teenagers feel responsible for their father, a kind of reversal of roles. Pala regards himself as a man, and Hawi devotes her time to taking care of baby Amor.

The fifth I-narrator is Malaika, the Mwagheras' second born child. Compared to her parents, elder sister and brother, Malaika has a less serious approach to life. We first meet her as a university student whose only pain is having to baby-sit "brats" (62) and to walk around with what she considers a funny name. Her recollection of adolescent boys teasing her through a Kiswahili song, *Malaika,* by Fadhili Williams (63) not only shows how different she is from other girls her age who would appreciate the boys' attention but it also provides comic relief by creating a humourous twist to an otherwise painful tale. When her mother asks her to baby-sit her younger siblings, she does it mainly because she has been allowed to drive her mother's BMW to the university. Her declaration that "life is sweet" (64) indicates the bliss she enjoys because she is not aware of the pain that Amor, her mother, is experiencing. Her free-spirited demeanour captures the innocence of youth which will, unfortunately, be shattered when Malaika discovers that her mother is suffering from an incurable disease.

Just like her siblings, Malaika feels lost when her mother dies. It takes the death of her mother for Malaika to discover and admit the kind of person she has been. She confesses:

> I was a very self-centred person until my mother's illness and death. I don't know why I took everything so much for granted. Youthful blindness perhaps: I never had a problem in my whole life. (167)

Malaika matures so fast that from a girl whose only bother had been her "funny" name, she is now concerned about serious issues such as poor planning in the cities, housing problems, health and education needs of urban dwellers, and even the challenges facing the contemporary family unit. Malaika's evolution as a character is Ogola's way of communicating the need for one to move on after the demise of a loved one. In addition, the change demonstrates Malaika's realisation that life is fleeting and one has got to make the best out of it. Lionnet argues that:

> The motif of reformation and rebirth through suffering is, paradoxically, part of a philosophy of life which binds the mortification of the flesh to a certain vital principle, a spiritual vigor through which the individual may graduate to a higher place of existence. (88)

The reformation of character and attitude that Hawi and Malaika exhibit after their mother's death can be seen in the sense of Lionnet's view of the tendency of pain and suffering to bring about a rebirth.

The sixth I-narrator is Igana Magu, the doctor who attends to Amor both at the hospice and at home until she dies, and who also falls in love with and marries Imani, the Mwagheras' eldest daughter. Through Igana's voice, Ogola narrates the experiences of disease, pain and death from a medical personnel's point of view. In addition, Igana's voice as an outsider to the Mwaghera family complements those of family members and enables Ogola to counter some of the possible biases of the other I-narrators. Furthermore, Igana's voice allows Ogola to narrate the experiences of families other than Mwaghera's who have to deal with the pain of chronic illness, particularly cancer, death, and the devastation faced by the sick and their families. Through Igana, Ogola demonstrates that cancer affects all sections of the society, including children.

Igana's work at the hospice teaches him that pain and death are not easy to deal with and he confesses that even though he tries to ameliorate others' pain and suffering, "I hurt, I tire and I can break" (70) meaning that he is just as vulnerable as his patients. Through Igana's voice, Ogola demonstrates how different people respond to the discovery that either they or their loved ones are suffering from cancer: anger, defiance, fear, denial, and acceptance. In addition, since Igana is a medical professional, Ogola employs his voice to offer a professional and objective view of how people should deal with such situations:

> Dying is not what one should fear – it's a part of life – as we know it. I have seen people die beautifully – not just peacefully. And if one lives in a state of conscious preparedness, even sudden and violent death must not be feared. What one must fear is the irrational fear of death and dying. On the other hand pain as in severe and continuous agony distracts, diminishes and may render a person unconscious of his humanness – an attribute we all need to the end, caregivers and patients alike. (73-74)

Igana's words, coming from a medical professional, are Ogola's way of narrating the effects of pain from a credible point of view. The reader will accept Igana's advice since it is given from a point of knowledge and experience. Apart from suffering from cancer, Ogola was also a medical professional so there is a way in which the character of Igana speaks for her as well; she has the authority of experience, both as a doctor and as a cancer patient, to speak about the illness. In her capacity as a writer, Ogola chooses art as an avenue to talk about a dreaded disease. Writing about the presentation of illness as metaphor in literary works, Susan Sontag observes that:

> As long as a particular disease is treated as an evil, invincible predator, not just a disease, most people with cancer will indeed be demoralized by learning what disease they have. The solution is to … rectify the conception of the disease, to de-mythicize it. (7)

By creating a narrative about cancer, Ogola attempts to de-mythicise the disease as suggested by Sontag.

Igana's relationship with Amor as her doctor allows her to pour out her pain and in the process receive the therapy she needs. As Amor narrates her life and her experience with cancer to Igana, her words complement what her children and employees have already said about her. Igana's assessment of the patient reveals a strong woman who is in control of her life in spite of the pain

she feels. Igana offers his professional support to Amor and her family until the end and he is present when Amor dies. His presence through Amor's last days demonstrates that patients of chronic illness and their families need both physical and emotional support from care givers, be they friends or medical personnel. When Amor dies, her family is too distraught to do anything and it is Igana who makes the necessary arrangements for the body to be taken to the funeral home. He explains his role as a medical professional saying, "The entire hospice staff is trained to treat a body with utmost refinement and respect. A careless comment or even a lewd joke is more than enough reason for summary dismissal" (149). His statement is Ogola's message to readers about the role of the hospice for cancer patients and an encouragement to them to seek medical care at such facilities. Moreover, he talks about the need for people to move on after the death of a loved one "to recreate happiness, to rebuild their destinies afresh – with new love, new laughter, new hope" (151).

Igana's presence in this narrative demonstrates that human beings suffer from other kinds of pain other than that brought about by disease. His mother having been kicked out of her home when she got pregnant as a teenager, Igana never knew any other member of his family. He grew up in the slums and, unfortunately, his mother died and he became a street boy until he was rescued and taken to school. He leads a lonely life with a sense of alienation since he has no family. His life only begins to have a semblance of meaning and happiness when he meets and falls in love with Imani.

Ogola juxtaposes a love story with one of disease, pain, suffering and death to demonstrate that the reality that pain and death are as much part of human existence as love is. The blossoming love between Imani and Igana in the midst of Amor's painful illness and death is Ogola's way of communicating hope and the need not to dwell too much on pain but rather on the beautiful things that life has to offer. The love relationship between Imani and Igana serves to rescue each one of them from suffering – Igana from loneliness and Imani from the pain of watching her mother battle cancer and eventually die. In a way Ogola suggests that love enables human beings to navigate even the most difficult of situations. After Igana has supported the Mwaghera family in dealing with Amor's illness and subsequent demise and later marrying Imani, his own happiness culminates in the discovery of his relatives, many years after his mother's death. Igana is fulfilled

and Ogola uses his story to create a sense of hope for better life in spite of the pain and suffering that characterise human existence.

Igana's story, told in the first person narrative voice, takes the reader back to the beginning of the novel where, through the third person narrative voice, Ogola narrates the events that led to Igana's mother living in the slums and working as a prostitute. The third person narrative voice thus complements Igana's voice since, as a first person narrator, he does not have the ability to narrate the story of his mother's experiences before he was born. In addition, since he was a small boy when her mother was suffering in her aunt's house before she moved out to live on her own, he cannot narrate that part of her life. It therefore becomes necessary for Ogola to employ shifting narrative voices to ensure the credibility of the narrator and, subsequently, the narrative.

The seventh I-narrator is Imani, Amor and Mwaghera's eldest child. She is a teacher in a secondary school in a rural area, a job she clearly enjoys and performs with zeal. Her kindness and unpretentious personality come through when she explains that despite the poor infrastructure in the area in which her school is located, she has no desire to seek a transfer because "these too are citizens of this country and deserving of as good an education as they can get" (80). This kindness is later seen when she takes up volunteer teaching in a slum school and later works towards giving those children better facilities. Her words and actions confirm what Amor says about her being compassionate, thus complementing Amor's words as a first person narrator.

As Imani talks about her students, particularly the female ones, she plays the role of a teacher both for the students and the readers. Ogola employs Imani's voice and her role as a teacher to speak, authoritatively, on issues that concern women:

> I believe that I have made a difference especially with the girls. Some have begun to dare believe that something better is possible for them too – that they are not automatically doomed by nature to be the doormat for some objectionable male. That they too are persons worthy of being loved and of attaining happiness. That if they truly applied themselves to their studies, education might yet prove to be the surest means of springing the lock to their prison of complete indigence and economic dependence. As for the boys, my theory is that, as men they will treat women as women allow themselves to be treated. (81)

Just like the case where Ogola uses the voice of a medical doctor, Igana, to give a medic's view of illness and death, she employs a teacher's voice to communicate the value she places on education, particularly for girls. Amor and her husband place a high premium on education and their children are aware that their parents will stop at nothing to give them the best education. Imani's place as a teacher lends credibility to the views she projects regarding the importance of education, which implicitly reveal Ogola's high regard for the same. In *Place of Destiny*, just like in her other novels, Ogola demonstrates her belief that the value of education cannot be gainsaid.

Imani is created as a foil to her sister Malaika. Where Malaika is vain and self-centred, Imani is mature, sensible and thoughtful. When she receives a telegram asking her to travel home immediately, she is quick to reason that her parents respect her work schedule and therefore would not call her home unless something is really wrong. Yet, much as she is concerned about what might have gone wrong, she takes time to notice, and narrate, the squalor in which a section of her society lives in:

> There are women with children on their backs begging in the streets; ragged hordes of people selling fruits and vegetables and second-hand clothes displayed on bits of sacking in the dust. Street children sniffing glue and walking around looking gazed – their little skinny bodies black with grime and dust and poverty. The smell… is utterly overwhelming. (88)

It is only Imani, in her characteristic thoughtfulness, who would momentarily forget the family problem at hand and go on to compare urban and rural poverty and proceed to give her thoughts on the state of poverty in the country.

Imani confesses that before she went to teach at Kambi ya Mbogo she had taken note of how other people live. Having been raised in Nairobi by well-to-do parents, she had not known that there are people who struggle to survive. It takes her the stay upcountry to realise that other people are "fellow travellers trudging the paths of this earth … with the same hopes, the same fears, the same desires" (89). She compares her suburban life in Spring Valley to the squalor in Korogocho, Mathare and Kibera slums and observes that a child being born in these slums:

> From his first gulp of necessary but foetid air – tainted by faeces and open sewers filled with grey-green sludge, by rotting offal and garbage of every imaginable type – the infant will have to possess the immunity of a horse to survive his first few months. (89-90)

The scatological terms which Imani uses in her vivid description of the poverty in urban slums reveal Ogola's concern with rising poverty in the country. When Imani later starts teaching in an informal school for orphans in the slums, Ogola uses Imani's experiences to demonstrate that poverty is a biting reality in urban Kenya. In a sense, Ogola seems to suggest that poverty is just as painful and debilitating as disease. In addition, her narration of poverty indicates that she is not just interested in telling a story about illness and death, but about social ills as well.

In the face of her mother's illness and imminent death, however, Imani is devastated. She realises just how much, despite being an independent young woman, a teacher with great dreams for herself, her students and her country, it is difficult to accept the death of a loved one, especially a mother:

> I thought I was grown up and ready to take on the responsibilities of adulthood, but now I know that I have just been a silly little girl full of grandiose ideas and bent on impressing upon my mama my independence. Who wants to be independent? I want my mama whole and well to tell me all the things I still need to know about being a woman. Just to be there. (91)

Imani's reaction to the news of her mother's illness demonstrates how illness and death cause suffering for both the patients and their families.

Through Imani, just like through Igana, Ogola narrates stories of other characters who are suffering from cancer. When Imani accompanies her mother to the hospice she gets to see other cancer patients waiting to see the doctor. She notices that each one of them is accompanied by a family member, a commentary on the need for family support. The patients are of a variety of ages, including children, which is Ogola's way of showing that pain and disease do not respect age, gender, or socio-economic class. Facing the stark reality of illness – and death – in this manner, Imani is filled with fear and observes that "one can cut the soul-pain in this place with a knife" (102). She personifies the place, giving it a soul to demonstrate just how disturbing it is for her to observe people suffering from so much pain.

It is through Imani that Ogola narrates about the death, of cancer, of a four or five-year-old boy. As Imani listens to the doctor announce to the other patients about the death of Timo, the little boy, she realises that what keeps the patients going is love and courage. Indeed, she is totally overwhelmed when they sing "the anthem of the brave" (103) to the departed Timo. The song not only breaks the monotony of narration in the novel but it allows the cancer patients to celebrate life as opposed to focusing on their imminent death. In addition, even those not suffering from cancer are encouraged to be grateful for the love they share with their ill relatives and look at life as a gift. As they sing the anthem to the brave they momentarily forget their own pain and, in a way, challenge death by celebrating life. Imani's sharing, in her narrative, of the pain of others not only allows her to come to terms with her own pain but also enables her to empathise with others who are suffering. In a way, Ogola allows the brief mention of the other characters at the hospice as part of Amor's story to demonstrate that pain is a universal human reality. It is during her visit to the hospice with her mother that Imani meets Igana. It is ironic that Imani decides that he does not like Igana during their first meeting yet they later fall in love and eventually get married.

Ogola narrates the effects of Amor's illness on her children through Imani. Being the eldest, Imani is able to notice the changes that have occurred in the lives of her siblings:

> Everyone in this family has changed beyond recognition. I feel sorry for my siblings who have had to abandon the carefree joys of childhood in the face of this crisis. Gone is the super confidence and joy of life that had hitherto marked [Malaika's] life. Pala looks fearfully fierce.… Hawi looks wistful and apprehensive. As for me… I am desolate that [my mother] is dying even as I discover the joys of an adult love and a purpose in life. (134)

The pain of watching their mother waste slowly by slowly in a way takes life's joys away from the children as well. While their mother experiences physical pain, they have to endure psychological pain. Imani confesses that Igana's love for her and his support for the rest of the family has been invaluable in helping them face their mother's illness.

Imani's experience while teaching at the school for orphans enables her to momentarily forget her own pain and narrate other people's painful experiences. The children she meets at the school have suffered in different ways including being raped, HIV/AIDS, epilepsy, child prostitution, poverty

and orphanhood. Ogola narrates the problems that children in urban slums suffer to demonstrate that apart from physical ailments such as cancer, this society also suffers social ills. The slum children's lives are contrasted to Imani's who has grown up in privilege but they all share the feeling of pain albeit differently. Working in the slum opens Imani's eyes to how the other half of her society lives:

> Just little children left on their own by an uncaring society until the problem has reached mind-boggling proportions. Indignant lamentations are no longer enough for me. I must act. In a way it also becomes a catharsis for the pain of watching my mother die. In a sense suffering is the other hidden face of the human condition, the face that actually humanizes us. But suffering can be alleviated, should be. (130)

Imani's compassionate nature comes through as we see her noticing others' suffering and her willingness to help. Through Imani, Ogola makes a commentary on the nature of society and offers that children, just like adults, should not be allowed to suffer in the manner in which the orphans in the school do. In addition, Imani's observation that "suffering humanises us" is Ogola's way of stating that pain and suffering are part of human existence and are universal.

The eighth I-narrator is Mwaghera Mrema, Amor's husband. His story demonstrates the pain of watching one's wife in pain yet there is nothing he can do to alleviate her pain. A practising Catholic, Mwaghera enables Ogola to examine the place of religion in one's life especially when faced with pain, suffering, death and bereavement. His words and thoughts reveal the immense devastation he feels. In addition watching his wife ailing shakes the very core of his religious faith:

> I realise that my wife's sickness will put to challenge everything I have ever believed in and held to be true. In the last few weeks I have gone from disbelief, to fury, to gut wrenching misery. I can't seem to hold in my mind a thought that is not filled with pain…. Does God exist…? How could a God who created the galaxies, who established the order which governs the universe, allow a bunch of rogue cells to eat away my love's liver without let or hindrance? (85)

Mwaghera is, clearly, suffering but in a philosophical twist equates Amor's illness to other catastrophes that often hit the world – "earthquakes, floods, cyclones, fires, epidemics" (86) – and realises that they are all part of human existence. His prayer to God to spare Amor demonstrates

how pain can make one desperate: "… I need her so badly. So very badly" (86). Mwaghera's anger, fear, confusion, misery and other feelings reveal why human beings get "uncomfortable with getting close to experiences of death, as well as the cocktail of emotions death excites" (Kiiru 2014: 299).

Mwaghera's narration complements what Amor and other characters tell us about Amor – that she is an independent and intelligent woman. Mwaghera confesses that he had initially felt threatened by the fact that his wife did not 'need' him but he later realised that that was her nature and his "sacred duty [was] always to make her feel special and cherished" (136). They have had a very happy marriage and it is no wonder that he is devastated by her illness and the thoughts of her death. To confirm Amor's good sense and realistic nature, Mwaghera narrates how she calmly asked him to make sure that he gets another woman after her death. Mwaghera is very uncomfortable with this discussion but Amor insists on having it. Indeed, in a humourous twist, she tells him, "I know African history may be fun, but I doubt good company at night" (137). Ogola, through Amor's words, addresses the importance of moving on after the death of a spouse. The humour is supposed to lighten the situation while at the same time indicating the need to be realistic. In Amor's opinion, which is really Ogola's view, the death of a spouse does not necessarily mean that the surviving partner should not remarry. Mwaghera finds it difficult to think that Amor is about to die and although he sees sense in Amor's words, he admits that it will be difficult for him to find another woman like her. This confession is a step towards his acceptance of the fact that his wife will not live much longer, acceptance which is necessary for him to let go and move on.

When Amor dies, Mwaghera confesses that her illness has caused her, him and their children "incredible pain" (152) and in a way, he is glad that it is all over. Mwaghera's thoughts indicate Ogola's view that there is a way in which death, ironically, marks the end of pain for both the patient and the relatives. Much as bereavement causes pain, it is the beginning of the healing process. One of Mwaghera's concerns after Amor's death is the process of funeral preparations. When at the mortuary delivering Amor's body, Mwaghera wishes that he "lived in traditional times or in a culture which insists on burial immediately upon death" (153). Ogola seems to suggest that the period many communities take in funeral preparations is unnecessary as it only extends the period of pain for the bereaved. In a way, Ogola suggests a rethinking of death and burial rites for

many African cultures. Mwaghera explains that Amor had expressed a desire to be buried quickly and with a minimum of fuss and that there should be no grave-stone. Ogola thus questions the need for exaggerated burials and grave-stones, suggesting, through Amor, that it would be more realistic to plant a tree or a shrub instead. After all, she reasons, "if you can't make a mark while still alive, why scar the earth with headstones when you are dead?" (153).

Amor's death naturally devastates Mwaghera and he finds it rather difficult to start another relationship. Instead he starts to study for another doctorate to shield himself from the loneliness he suffers. Ogola presents his desire to build a kind of wall around himself as a normal reaction to a loved one's death. Eventually, after five years, he is able to let go of his pain and get into a relationship with another woman. That Mwaghera moves away not just from his home but to another country symbolises the drastic change that occurs after losing one's spouse. In addition, it symbolises the need to turn over a new leaf and move on. It is only after he has been away from his children and his home that Mwaghera is able to appreciate "the sunshine on a beautiful day and the simple joy of being alive" (198). Moreover, Ogola demonstrates that moving on is an individual effort. Although Mwaghera's children have been pestering him to get another woman, he only gets into a relationship when he feels that he is ready.

The ninth I-narrator is Fr. Isidore Gaya, a priest. Ogola employs a priest's voice to give a religious view and interpretation of pain, suffering, death and bereavement. People often seek answers about these subjects from religion and Amor is no exception. As an outsider to Amor's immediate family, Fr. Gaya's voice serves to complement and corroborate other voices that praise the protagonist's virtues. In addition, his presence allows Amor a chance to talk about her pain and imminent death to someone other than family, and a person who, due to his vocation, is able to offer her therapy for her soul. They talk about "things religious and things existential. About love and life. About sorrow and joy. About why things are as they are and not any other way. About meaning – in life and in death. About good and evil" (142).

By talking to Fr. Gaya, Amor is able to realise and accept that suffering and death are part of the human existence. Fr. Gaya is the one who administers the last rites on Amor as well as gives Holy Communion to the family. Ogola's narration of this act demonstrates that "religious belief or ritual practice acts as a therapeutic agent on death and bereavement" (Kiiru 2014:300). The family's

participation in this religious act serves to give them strength as they live with Amor's impending demise. Indeed, Imani confesses that after the rite she observes that "the afternoon sun is shining brightly and I know that all is well and all will indeed be well" (147). Imani's words symbolise hope and acceptance of the situation, difficult as it is.

The tenth I-narrator is Magu Igana, Dr Igana's uncle. He is the avenue through which Dr Igana is reunited with his family, bringing the doctor's troubled mind to rest. Magu is unhappy with his father, he who kicked out his young daughter from home after she got pregnant. Magu, through the first person narrative voice, confides in the reader about his feelings for his father:

> I hate him and I have great doubts whether the acquisition [of large tracts of land] was legal. Despite all the money and land and coffee and shares in God-alone-knows how many companies, we are the unhappiest family I know…. (181)

Magu's description of his father in a way explains the character of the old man and makes the reader understand why he sent away his daughter thus condemning Dr Igana, his grandson, to a life of struggle and rootlessness. In addition, the situation of the Igana family enables Ogola to demonstrate that what matters in family relations is not money but love and happiness. The writer contrasts the Igana and Mwaghera families to show how different families relate to one another.

Just like Amor, Magu Igana suffers from cancer. By creating another character who suffers from the chronic illness and making him the person who enables Dr Igana to discover his family, Ogola demonstrates that regardless of the differences among people, disease, pain, suffering and death are common factors. By being one in suffering the characters reveal that the one thing that unifies all kinds of people is their frail human nature. Disease does not discriminate and neither does death. Magu Igana's voice also complements the third person narrative voice employed at the beginning of the narrative. The use of multiple points of view is part of Ogola's effort to communicate the various perspectives with which human beings view disease, pain, suffering and death.

The presence of children, teenagers, adults and even elderly characters in the novel in a way demonstrates the various stages of life that human beings go through. Death is a rite of passage

and Ogola indicates that although it is a difficult rite to deal with, the reality is that humans are mortal beings and death is an expected finality. As Kiiru (2014) observes:

> In their anticipation of physical death and spiritual birth, rites of passage rest on the belief that an individual will mark, through appropriate rituals, necessary stages of life. In this way, the rites rest on the principle that the individual matures with age and stages and, that with maturation leaves a mark on the society. (304)

Amor may be dead, but the time she spends with her family and friends, especially during her illness, in a way helps them to cope with the pain of bereavement since they anticipate her death as a natural part of human existence.

Conclusion

Place of Destiny allows Ogola to artistically explore human experience by focusing on the pain of dealing with chronic illness, death, and bereavement. Amor and her family acknowledge, albeit painfully, that, as Dylan Thomas suggests in his poem, "Do Not Go Gently into that Good Night," death is inevitable. Ogola, through a multiplicity of voices, demonstrates that pain and suffering are part of natural human life and that pain manifests itself in various ways. By employing several first person narrators, Ogola allows each character to narrate their pain in the best way they know how, and each in their own time and space. It is as if the reader is a therapist and the characters' walk into the therapy room individually so that they are able to share their pain without any hindrances. While pain is universal, it is a personal burden and each person feels their pain differently. It is therefore important that each of the characters gets a chance to speak about their individual pain while still recognising that it is also a collective experience.

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