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Muriungi, Colomba Kaburi

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EMERGING TRENDS IN KENYAN CHILDREN'S FICTION: A STUDY OF *SASA SEMA*'S LION BOOKS

Colomba Kaburi Muriungi

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, 2006

Abstract
This thesis is a study of the *Sasa Sema*'s Lion Series of biographies written for young readers. The *Sasa Sema* project is concerned with archiving the stories of famous historical figures and contemporary heroes. The research examines the shifts or the trends these biographies take as compared to what has been in existence in discourses on children's writing in Kenya in the past. I argue that the issues that these biographies are concerned with are a novelty in Kenyan children's literature. By writing biographies of historical figures in Kenya, the authors are not only making an intervention by creating new models for children's literature, but they also show that the story of the nation cannot be enacted outside the heroic struggles of its peoples. I further argue that the *Sasa Sema* project is significant because many writers of children's literature in Kenya, and in East Africa in general, write mostly about childhood stories rather than historical figures. Also, the characters used in the biographies are adult characters rather than young fictional animal and human characters that have characterized children's literature in the past. I conclude that these changes broaden the scope of children's literature in Kenya.

The changes in writing for children in Kenya, evident in the biographies under study are examined across the chapters that make up this thesis. Chapter One attempts to locate the biographies under study within Kenya's children's literary tradition by looking at the trajectory this literature has taken from pre-colonial time to the present. Chapter Two examines how orality as a stylistic device is used in the texts under study first, to create literary appreciation and secondly, as a means of summoning literature from different cultural backgrounds in which the texts are based. The chapter argues that the use of oral art forms evokes identity and signals cultural diversity in the Kenyan society. Chapter Three addresses the question of female heroism and gender stereotypes in children's literature. This chapter intimates that biographies, whose narratives draw from real life situations, help in revising the representation of the female character in children's literature. Chapter Four examines how individual stories are used to narrate Kenya's history of decolonization for the children. This chapter also avows that the process of colonization created heroes through colonialist institutions such as schools and prisons. Chapter Five examines how the *Sasa Sema* project argues for the recognition of minority groups that have been marginalized in narratives of nation formation, while Chapter Six discusses the biography of Dedan Kimathi a Mau Mau freedom fighter. The female narrator in Kimathi's biography, who is also positioned as a participant in the war portrays children's literature as a vehicle for paying homage to women's role in the Mau Mau war. In Chapter Seven, I attempt to harmonize the conclusions reached in the previous chapters.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Colomba Kaburi Muriungi

_____day of _____, 2006.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the three members of my family: My husband Peter, and my two sons Vincent and Victor.

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****

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