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Emerging trends in Kenyan children's fiction: A study of Sasa Sema's Lion books

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Chapter Two

Invoking the Community: Orality and Cultural Diversity

This chapter examines how orality[1] in the biographies under study is utilized in the written text for specific purposes. Using Eileen Julien's (1992) argument that orality and writing are mutually interdependent modes existing in perpetual interaction, this chapter will argue that orality interacts with the written form in the texts under study not only to create a narrative structure that tells the stories of the personalities under study, but this interaction also helps to summon literature from different communities, and thus to evoke cultural identities. The appropriation of songs, poems and other oral art forms from various Kenyan communities is read as evoking community's collective identity, which is further read as an expression of cultural diversity in the Kenyan nation. I contend that these oral elements not only create an illusion of fiction in the stories, but they also work to shape the imagination of the young readers.

According to Pat Caplan, the notion of identity can be taken to refer to "perceived qualities of sameness, as a result of which people associate themselves, or are associated by others, with particular groups or categories on the basis of some common features" (2004: 7). Such a definition encompasses the notions of differences and presupposes the existence of the other because identity is only understandable when pitted against difference. While this discussion examines various community/ethnic identities that ensue from the use of oral art forms from different communities, it is important to note that these ethnic identities do not in any way undermine national identity. Instead, they provide a template upon which national history and the broader nationalist identities are imagined and pursued

[1] I use the term oral in Craig Mackenzie's sense – the mode of expression, which has kinship with cultural interaction transacted by the word of mouth; a kind of story that simulates the dynamics of the spoken word on the printed page (1997: 541, fn 3).

because it is out of the varied ethnic identities that the nation comes into being. It is these differences that make up the whole, thus challenging the notion of a nation as a homogenous entity, and consequently promoting a wide-ranging kind of national identity. Specific groups of people can therefore identify with both their community [say Kikuyu] and Kenya, the nation. James Ogude for example posits that Mau Mau songs, [which are examined in this chapter], "were used by ordinary men and women to express their identity both as belonging to the house of Mumbi (meaning the Agikuyu community) and also with the desire for the broader Kenyan nationhood in the face of colonial oppression" (1999: 41). Ogude concludes that a "construction of a specifically Agikuyu identity did not therefore preclude the imagination of the wider Kenyan identity" (Ibid). In their discussion on tribe and nation, Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (1992b) also argue that ethnic identities are templates for national identities, and that people can restate an identity in order to enter larger arenas of skill and power (328-9).

I start this discussion by looking at storytelling and how the figure of the oral narrator is deployed in some of the texts. I use Craig Mackenzie's (1993) supposition on the *skaz* narrative technique to argue that the deployment of the oral narrator bestows a communicative structure within the narrative. Mackenzie argues that the introduction of fictional narrator into the written story form constitutes an attempt to simulate the spoken word on the written page. This deployment of an oral narrator within the written literature is what is called *skaz*.[2] The storyteller is positioned in the texts under study as a repository of community knowledge who knows not only the story of the character s/he tells but one who also possesses the knowledge about the whole community. The oral narrator in these texts evokes certain cultural practices from the society in the process of narrating the protagonist's story which presents that person's life as one embedded in his/her societal life.

[2] Details of the s*kaz* narrative technique are covered in the theory part in Chapter One.

This is in line with Ato Quayson's (1997) supposition that every work of art has a cultural dimension, which discursively interacts with other aspects of the literary text to locate it in a particular field of relevance instead of another. I argue that the authors give the story a central position because it not only helps in shaping the literary work, but through the storyteller figure, cultural knowledge and communal experiences of different communities are passed to the readers. While examining the deployment of the oral storytelling techniques, I also look at how the ogre motif is employed, not just to educate children but how this motif is used for other purposes, specifically to critique tradition, as we will see in the biography of Mwana Kupona.

In the second part of the discussion, I look at how songs, dance and oral poetry are utilised in the texts. I view the utilisation of songs or dance from specific communities in the art of narration of individual stories as signalling those communities' cultural identity. In this part I pay attention to *taarab* music (song, dance and the accompanying instruments) used in Mwana Kupona's biography. I read *taarab* music as signalling societal artefacts and a means of evoking the Swahili identity. I also briefly examine the transformations that *taarab* has undergone – a transformation that I read as suggesting that cultural issues cannot remain stagnant. These changes in form and content of *taarab*, I suggest, portray the Swahili identity as an "identity in motion". Mau Mau songs are also examined in this part of the discussion as used in the biography of Dedan Kimathi. As I will show, these songs call upon the Kikuyu community's past and common ancestry, which is linked to their first parents Gikuyu and Mumbi. I argue that identifying with the ancestors is an insurrective order which aids the authors in claiming right to a past which links the characters to this past and to an imagined ethnic identity. In Elijah Masinde's biography we discover that Alembi uses songs in the narration of Masinde's story to perpetuate the theme of heroism. Alembi shows that one of the uses of songs in the Bukusu oral tradition is to praise

heroes and other achievers. Songs are generally deployed across the texts for different purposes, which signal the cultural diversity we are talking about.

In the third part, I examine the deployment of proverbs and sayings, and argue that they [proverbs and sayings] contain condensed experiences from the society's past, and thus portray the richness of African oral traditions. I assert that the proverbs used in these texts signal specific community's identity because, often, proverbs are only meaningful when placed within the ethnographic background of the societies from which they are drawn, although there are times the wisdom of some proverbs assume a universal dimension. Towards the end of the chapter I discuss the fantastic which I read not as the authors' own creation but as a device which is drawn from the community's folklore. I contend that the fantastic is also an important device in narrating heroic stories.

I now look at the use of storytelling and how the narrator is used not only as the repository of tribal history and cultural values, but also as the mouthpiece from which the story proceeds.

Storytelling and the Oral Narrator

One of the most important features of orality that is manifest in the junior biographies under study is the introduction of the storyteller figure from whose mouth the narrative seemingly proceeds. Ernest Pereira (1986) argues that the introduction of a fictional narrator enables the author to distance himself from the narrative and at the same time acts as a means of recreating the situation and recapturing the ambience of the storyteller's direct contact with the audience (103). Through the fictional storyteller the author authoritatively manipulates the narrative and directs it towards his desired path while he poses as a spectator. The fictional narrator then becomes both presenter and a participant in his own story: it is he who now speaks to a specific audience (Pereira 1986). The oral narrator in the texts under study is

positioned as the repository of tribal history and cultural values, as well as one who knows the character of the person whose story s/he tells. The storyteller therefore guides the reader into understanding the protagonist's story as one embedded in the society's life.

In some of the biographies under study, authors deliberately become narrators of their own stories, for example Evan Mwangi in *Bildad Kaggia* (2001), Egara Kabaji in *Jomo Kenyatta* (2002) and Elizabeth Mugi-Ndua in *Mekatilili wa Menza* (2000). This shows the utilization of the simple s*kaz* narrative technique. Other writers utilise parodistic s*kaz* where they choose an oral narrator, usually a grandmother, who tells the story to either an active audience, for example Ezekiel Alembi in *Elijah Masinde* (2000), or a non-respondent audience evident in *Dedan Kimathi* (2003) by David Njeng'ere. In *Jaramogi Oginga Odinga* (2004), Alembi combines orality with writing and produces a complex narrative. On the one hand, Alembi borrows the features of Luo oral traditions by utilising an oral narrator – this time a grandfather [not a grandmother!].[3] However instead of this grandfather figure telling an implied oral tale like the one used in *Dedan Kimathi* (2003) and *Elijah Masinde* (2000), he writes a letter to the grand daughter outlining and explaining the deeds of Jaramogi Oginga. Such a combination signals how orality and literacy comfortably coexist in narratives rather than associating orality with African-ness and literacy with the west. Eileen Julien recognizes the strategic nature of the use of orality in the written texts by authors when she argues that the use of oral narrative elements by African writers is neither natural nor gratuitous, but it is done with a purpose. These elements, she asserts, "solve or help to solve a formal or aesthetic problem that the writer faces and they suggest at the same time facets of a particular social situation" (1992: 45). Julien's statement suggests that writers can transform narrative strategies to serve their aims and their immediate socio-cultural and political agenda, a

[3] This deliberate mascularization of the oral narrative is a sense a subversion/inversion of gender stereotype that sees storytelling as a woman's thing.

transformation, which I argue the authors of the texts under study are involved in. For example, in Masinde's narrative, Alembi utilises the oral narrative technique through the grandmother figure, whereby he fashions Masinde's story to speak to issues of colonialism and resistance to colonialism through the *Dini ya Msambwa* movement. Orality is therefore useful in uncovering the ideological and political possibilities in the text (Phaswane Mpe 1996).

The manner in which the oral narrator tells the story is what lends orality to the text – that is, the oral storytelling techniques. These techniques surface in some of the biographies right at the start of the narrative by having beginnings that are formulaic. The following extracts demonstrate this point:

> A long time ago there lived a hard-working woman called Wambui. Her home was on Ng'enda Ridge, near Thika town, and she was the mother of two sons. Every morning while it was still dark, Wambui joined the other women as they walked down the hills to their small plots. They sang songs in praise of hard work and ridiculed the lazy people in the society (Kabaji 2000: 1).
>
> ……..
>
> Long, long ago there was a prophetess called Mipoho. She lived in Kenya near the coast of Indian Ocean. Mipoho prophesied many things. She prophesied the coming of the white man to Africa. She said some "white butterflies" would come from the ocean and would bring with them many changes, both good and bad. Mipoho also prophesied that a girl would be born in *Kaya* Giriama who would become a great leader. She would bring victory to the Giriama against a powerful enemy (Mugi-Ndua 2000:1)

The first quote is from Jomo Kenyatta's biography while the second is from the biography of Mekatilili wa Menza. In both quotations the authors

appropriate the oral narrative traditions by placing the story within a time in the past which is not quite specific. This technique presents the characters as part of the communities past, and thus these stories are embedded in their community life and culture that has been handed down from one generation to another. A phrase like "A long time ago …" occurring at the beginning of the story places the narrative in a distant past which shows the narrative's reliance on memory. And the evocation of Mipoho's prophecy in Mekatilili's biography is akin to societies regulated by ritual and rites, divined by societal or tribal visionaries. What I find important in this biography is the appropriation of myth, which is used to emphasize what shaped Mekatilili's life. Thus her life and character become like a cultural code through which people remember (Quayson 1997). In the first quotation Kabaji positions Kenyatta's story within the Kikuyu farming tradition seen through the way Wambui [his mother] and other women went to their farms early in the morning. Within the first paragraph of the book, we also learn the geography and the location of Kenyatta's home. Emphasis on hard work is also a strategic technique that the author employs to direct the reader into recognizing acts that are appreciated in the society. As we will see later in this discussion, Kenyatta's life history is embedded in his community's life and throughout the text, the narrator guides the readers in understanding the cultural practices of this community.

As already mentioned, the text *Elijah Masinde: Rebel with a Cause* (2000) by Ezekiel Alembi utilizes the grandmother figure, with an implied active audience which shows the deployment of the parodistic s*kaz* narrative technique. We saw in Chapter one that in parodistic *skaz* a storyteller figure is introduced to tell the story on behalf of the writer but on the whole she/he expresses the writer's ideas. What we realize in Masinde's story however is that although grandmother is the storyteller, Alembi seems to have been eavesdropping or watching the children's and grandmother's activities and therefore he acts as a commentator. As a frame narrator, Alembi takes up the

narrative and alerts the readers about what is taking place between the audience and the fictional narrator. This kind of narration signals an advanced use of the *skaz* narrative mode with two competing voices from the fictional narrator and frame narrator, thus making the narrative voice complex. Alembi imbues grandmother [fictional narrator] with the qualities of a good storyteller evident in the way she utilises songs in her narration and sometimes posing questions to ensure that her audience is alert. Such techniques that are embedded in the narrative help in recreating Masinde's story. The setting of Masinde's narrative is also typical of the traditional oral storytelling sessions which evoke the fire-side ethos of the oral tale:

> The night was bright with stars, …. A gentle breeze from Mt Masaba, Mt Elgon, rustled through the leaves and caressed the group of four boys and six girls who sat round the fire outside grandmother's hut…. When grandmother came outside, the first child to spot her was Barasa. "Grannie!" he yelled…. "Tell us more stories!" cried Nelima…. "I will tell you more and more stories," Grandmother assured them…. (1-3)

Alembi here sets up an atmosphere that conjures the common sessions of traditional communal oral narration. Cora Agatucci (1988)[4] argues that oral African storytelling is essentially a communal participatory experience. Such participation, Agatucci adds, is an essential part of children's traditional indigenous education on their way to initiation to full humanness. In the above quotation, the reader is prepared for "a real" oral storytelling session at the very beginning of the text. Alembi therefore utilises the Bukusu/Luhya narrative technique/tradition as a shaping influence to the narrative form and structure. Grandmother's words, "I will tell you more and more stories", show us that storytelling is a cumulative/never ending activity. In other words, she suggests she has been telling stories to her audience in the past.

[4] http://web.cocc.edu/cagatucci/classes/hum211/afrstory.htm

Evidence of these stories is seen when the children start guessing what kind of story they are about to be told. Some say it is about "wanakhamuna, the hare", others think it is about "namunyu, the hyena", while others mention "kunanai the ogre" (6). There is also a conversational tone between grandmother and her audience, which lends orality to the text:

> The children jumped. "Who was Elijah Masinde?" asked Nekesa.
> That must be a big namunyu [the hyena]!" put in Simiyu. ….
> Grandmother replied, "No, Elijah Masinde was a human being. He was born and grew up here in Bungoma."(6)

In this quotation Simiyu draws from his repository knowledge of narratives and guesses that Masinde is a hyena. This as I have said signals a prior experience of different stories. The hare, hyena and the ogre motif show the entrenchment of the oral narrative in this community. In addition, the question and answer sections between the grandmother and her audience that is utilised throughout the text help to advance Masinde's story. At another level, the clarification the narrator makes about the person of Elijah Masinde in the above quotation portrays an authorial intrusion – suggesting time is up to diversify characterisation in children's literature, by supplementing fictional animal characters [who have dominated these stories in the past] with real human figures.

Egara Kabaji also implicitly draws from the rich Kikuyu oral storytelling archive. Kamau's mother used to tell her two sons stories, including the story of Gikuyu and Muumbi. One day Kamau comes home and says he had seen the ogre that his mother had mentioned in the story. In this instance Kabaji shows how children value stories, and how in themselves they [stories] can influence children's lives. The story form is therefore deployed in such a text not only to show how the narrative is set within the character's oral traditions but this technique signals how oral storytelling is a useful device for

educating the young. In the process, readers not only learn about the personality in question but they also understand certain societal values. I am aware that some critics may have the view that the story form may dilute some specifics of narratives like the ones under scrutiny which are meant to tell stories of real historical figures to the young. However, I argue after Ina Schabert (1990: 35) that such novelistic devices like oral narrative technique do not dilute the story but they are vital in developing historical facts into complete narratives.

Through the grandmother figure, Alembi draws the readers' attention to the rituals of naming children through the use of seasons in the Bukusu tradition. The narrator says:

> The Bukusu name their children according to the season or activities happening during the birth of the baby. Masinde was born when they were digging new land. And at the time, a kind of grass called *Masinde* was growing there. That is how young Elijah got his name, Masinde (9-10).

Again, Elijah Masinde belonged to Bakananachi Machengo age group which means "construction". This is because at the time when Masinde's age group was circumcised, "the Kenya-Uganda Railway was being constructed in Bungoma" (15). Rituals and naming are forms of historical retrieval, or to quote Ato Qauyson (1997) again, they are "cultural codes through which people remember"; made possible by the oral storyteller who is seen as the repository of tribal history and cultural values. Thus the storyteller acts as a mirror in which the community can reflect itself. Through the grandmother figure, Alembi not only incorporates issues concerning the culture of Masinde's society into the narrative, but he also explores the idea of cultural diversity, seen in the way grandmother explains how communities differed in rituals that accompanied their rites of passage. Some removed teeth while

others circumcised their men (14-15). The mediating role of the narrator becomes visible here through grandmother who is cast as possessing knowledge concerning not only her own community, but also other neighbouring communities. As Harold Scheub (1996) argues, the storyteller is a creator, teacher and a guide to the society. Scheub sees the storyteller as the one who most regularly and persuasively touches every member of the community. A creator who moves behind the facts of history, and clarifies, defines, and elucidates the experiences of people, thereby sustaining the society's traditions, those institutions that give context and meaning to daily life (149). Obiechina argues that "the story is a primary form of the oral tradition, primary as a mode of conveying culture, experience and values and as a means of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, feelings, and attitudes in oral societies" (1993: 124). Alembi therefore gives the story a central position in *Elijah Masinde* as it helps in shaping literary works as well as passing cultural knowledge to the new generation of Kenyan children. Grandmother is used in this narrative to point out the complex configuration of Kenya's peoples and nation-state by indicating the existence of other communities alongside her own.

Another link between orality and authority of grandmother as a narrator is seen in *Dedan Kimathi: Leader of the Mau Mau*, (2003). From the start of this narrative, we are alerted that the story is narrated by a fictional narrator and not from an authorial voice. In the preface Njeng'ere writes "… I decided to use a fictitious character, a young girl called Wangu to tell the story of Kimathi" (viii). In the story, Wangu was supposed to take a letter to Kimathi in the forest when she was a young girl, but presently she is an old grandmother and she tells Kimathi's story to her grandchildren. David Njeng'ere finds a voice that is immediately recognizable within the community, in this case a grandmother [Wangu], whom he entrusts with the narration of Dedan Kimathi's story. The grandmother figure lends authority to Njeng'ere's voice and consequently he narrates the events that happened in

the lives of Mau Mau freedom fighters, with confidence, "in the knowledge that he has bestowed authority upon himself by claiming kinship with storytellers of the old" (Muriungi 2002: 34). Grandmother stands for the collective and narrates issues that relate to people's struggles through one character's story. Eileen Julien argues that aspects of oral tradition, as of the prose tradition, are not simply given, they are chosen. Julien says these aspects are present in Ngugi's work [*Devil on the Cross*], not because they are essentially African but because they offer possibilities to achieve specific ends – in this instant, to appeal to a specific audience (1992: 142). In Kimathi's story, the author consciously borrows the oral storytelling technique from his community not only for the representation of community identity, but also to construct a work that is directed at a modern audience.

One feature that surfaces in the utilisation of the oral storytelling technique that I want to mention at this point is the ogre. In African folklore, stories about ogres and ogresses teach children that "their world was not full of angels only – there were other lesser human beings who could harm them" (Mbure 1997: 5). Such stories therefore challenge children to be intelligent in order to survive in a world where survival is paramount. The ogre motif is used in some of the biographies not just as evidence of storytelling practices in some communities, but it is used for certain other purposes. For example, Kitula King'ei utilises the ogre motif in Mwana Kupona's biography to question some Islamic traditions that are traceable to some Kenyan coastal communities. The author is especially uneasy with the idea of girls having to wait until their wedding day where they meet their prospective husbands. Mwana Hashima asks her friend Zuhura, who is about to get married: "well, if on your wedding day you find your husband is an ogre, what will you do?" Zuhura in turn answers that she would run away (25). The two girls do not admire the idea of arranged marriages but they somehow have to live up to the expectations of the society. Luckily for Zuhura her husband turns out to be a handsome man (43). In the exchange between the two girls, we read

some intertextuality between oral narratives and the story that the narrator tells. The ogre is a common character in many African oral narratives. In some of these stories girls find themselves married to ogres who pretend to be human beings. The fate of such girls is either they rescue themselves through their own wits,[5] or brave relatives rescue them. Sometimes the ogre eats them, though rarely. A reference to the ogre in the case of Zuhura's wedding shows the girls have been brought up in a cultural environment with the art of oral storytelling. This motif could sometimes be employed to warn young children against venturing far away from home in case they encounter the ogre who would take them captive and supposedly eat them. However, in Mwana Kupona's biography King'ei employs the motif of the ogre not to warn young girls and children, but he transforms the motif to critique arranged marriages that are evident in Mwana Kupona's community. Positing of Zuhura's marriage as an arranged one helps to teach children some of the cultural practices concerning marriage in African communities. We could also conclude that by using Mwana Hashima and Zuhura to critique arranged marriages, the author articulates his own position with regard to such practices.

In many of the stories with the oral narrator discussed above, there is recurrent use of song in between the narration, which sometimes acts as break from the narration, but at the same time such songs help explore different facets of the narrative. I will now examine the use of song, dance and oral poetry in the biographies.

Song, Dance and Oral Poetry

In this part of the discussion, I am of the view that that the authors of the biographies utilise songs, dance and oral poetry drawn from different

[5] For example in an oral story "The Orange Thieves" by Charity Dahal, published by Phoenix (1996), Muthoni saves herself from a marriage by a giant by tricking him (the giant), along with his friends. The giants are all burnt up in a bonfire and the girl is free to go back to her parents. See page (43-51) of the text.

communities, which portray the cultural practices of these communities. In *Mwana Kupona: A Poetess from Lamu* by Kitula King'ei the evocation of coastal/Swahili/Arab culture is witnessed through the Swahili songs sung during Zuhura's wedding. These wedding songs that are both educative and entertaining are still sung in contemporary wedding gatherings and they encompass a variety of meanings (Kelly Askew, 1999: 68), one of them being to warn evildoers who would seek to harm the bride. Since one can often sing what one cannot easily say, the wedding scene gives singers freedom to express all that they may wish to say to the couple. The songs at Zuhura's wedding are accompanied by societal musical instruments and vigorous dance:

> A special *taarab* group played songs specifically composed for the occasion. There were seven musicians. One of them was blowing a *tarumbet*a, a trumpet, three of them were on *ngoma*, drums, and each of the others was strumming an *udi*, a guitar. They sang and played songs that expressed feelings of romance and excitement. One song said that love is like a wound in the heart of the lover, a secret that the singer had to express:
>
> *Mapenzi ni kama donda*
> *Yaingiapo moyoni*
> *Nimechoka vumilia*
> *Leo nawapasulia*
> (39-40).
>
> ….
>
> The dancers were busy on the floor trying to out-do each other with their styles and movement: "Again! Again!" thundered the crowd, raving more music" (40-41).

The word *taarab* originally comes from the Arabic word *tariba*, which means to be agitated, to be moved (Musau 2004: 177). As a type of music *taarab* refers to both the performance by a group of persons, or the event, as well as the music (ibid). Musau posits that although *taarab* was initially sung in Arabic, in the 1920s the first African orchestras started singing in Kiswahili. *Taarab* is conventionally performed at weddings and social gatherings but over the years the singing of *taarab* has become open and versatile. Musau explores the dynamics and innovations in *taarab* and shows that it has undergone transformations not only in terms of incorporating modern instruments like the violin, electric guitars, keyboards etc, but *taarab* has also been transformed in terms of themes, language use, and performance. Musau argues that while the theme of love continues to dominate *taarab*, as it was sung mostly at weddings, this type of music is also sensitive to the changing socio-political environment, sometimes condemning some mannerisms of certain politicians, or talking to topical issues like HIV/AIDS (183-184). And while *taarab* was characterised by the use of metaphorical language, Musau argues that modern *taarab* has been characterised by the use of plain language (185). In addition, its performance is no longer restricted to weddings and social gatherings that have to do with Swahili identity and culture. Quoting King'ei (1992: 40) Musau argues:

> While retaining its traditional role, the performance of *taarab* is now held in hotels, guesthouses, tourist resorts and night clubs. It also features prominently as part of entertainment for national days and in election campaigns and political rallies by different candidates and political parties (2004: 186-187).

Taarab is also played on radio and performed on TV in Kenya and Tanzania (Ntarangwi 2003: 163; Musau 2004: 187). *Taarab* can therefore be seen to have been responding to modernity and the need for change, showing that cultural

issues may not remain stagnant. To illustrate the transformation *taarab* has undergone Musau writes:

> *Taarab* has … moved outside the confines of Swahili communities…. [I]t has been appropriated by large segments of the Kenyan and Tanzanian populations…. [T]he famous *taarab* singer Malika in 1998, sang *vidonge* (tablets). This song became very popular in Kenya and was played in *matatus* (shared taxis), bars and discos…. [A]t one time it was used by students in one of the local universities as a rallying call in their demonstrations (187).

Taarab has therefore been transformed into a mode which hails audiences way beyond the coastal communities, as it intersects with other forms from other cultures. It has moved outside the confines of Swahili communities, in this way becoming like a travelling narrative. But what does the changing musical performance suggest about the Swahili cultural identity? To some extent, these changes make the Swahili identity an identity "in motion". Since *taarab* could be sung in variety of places for different kinds of audiences, as Musau argues, a *taarab* singer, or by extension a Swahili person, could be said to have multiple identities. At one time he could have the identity of the traditional Swahili area, and at another time could have an identity belonging to larger geopolitical entities (Musau 2004: 188).

However, King'ei's use of *taarab* music in Mwana Kupona's biography is in the context of its old age use where it was restricted to social gatherings. In the scene quoted earlier [page 58], we notice that the singing and dancing is restricted to the traditional *taarab* musical instruments. The music, dance and instrumental collection signal societal artefacts, which represents the Swahili [coastal group] cultural identity. The songs sang at Zuhura's wedding are also characterized by the use of metaphorical messages of love, sexuality and

praise. For example, the following two verses are from one of the romantic songs sang at the wedding:

Kasha langu la zamani,
Kasha lisilo tumbuu
Kitasa ndani kwa ndani,
na ufunguo ni huu
Alofungua n'nani,
amelivunda maguu

Kasha muundo wa kale,
si muundo wa kisasa
Ni kazi ya watu wale,
sidhaniye Mombasa
Usifanye makerere,
melipa mengi mapesa. …

My old-styled chest, which has no fastener,
Is locked internally and I have the key
Whoever opened it has broken its legs.

The chest was made long ago, not new,
From far away, not from Mombasa,
Do not say anything, I've spent a lot on it. …
(44-45).

In this *taarab* song, the bride is compared to an old-styled chest, which has been kept intact (is locked internally). This chest, is also not just a local artefact but from far away. And it is also expensive. These words have a deeper connotation – expressing the worth of the bride. One can go further and assume that the fact that this chest (bride) has been locked internally

means that the bride is a virgin, etc. Of importance in this song is the moral lesson for young girls who wish to get married. But what one would probably want to notice here beyond the metaphors in the song, is King'ei's utilisation of the *taarab* songs as cultural artefacts, and as an aspect of oral tradition that evoke identity. Thus although we have seen that the *taarab* has adapted to constant change over time, the use of such songs allow us to read distinctive culture and identity associated with the Swahili, what Musau calls "the identity of traditional Swahili area".

The *taarab* songs are weaved into Mwana Kupona's biography so that through these songs certain themes and lessons are explored. For instance, the theme of marriage and specific lessons concerning marriage like good conduct and fear of God are incorporated into these songs. Thus orality here is used as a tool to explore and pass on specific ideals. And as Ato Qauyson (1997: 158) argues, every work of art has a cultural dimension, which discursively interacts with other aspects of the literary text to locate it in a particular field of relevance instead of another.

Mwana Kupona writes her poem during her last days of life as an instruction manual for her daughter. This poem is supposed to teach her daughter how to behave and how to cope with various situations of life. King'ei invokes the society's oral practices further when he shows that although Mwana Kupona wrote her poem to be read by her daughter, she [Mwana Kupona] occasionally recited some verses to her [Mwana Hashima]. For example, in her conversation with her daughter Mwana Kupona recites verses to warn her daughter against gossiping (14), that she should avoid jokes that annoy others (5) and also make sure she keeps her body smart by wearing decorative ornaments because "wearing ornaments increases one's outward beauty and is a mark of good culture" (12):

Pete sitoke zandani Always put rings on your fingers,

hina sikome nyaani henna on the palms of your hands
wanda sitoe matoni wanda on your eyelids
na nshini kuitia and on your eyebrows.
(13).

The verse above and others that are incorporated into the text demonstrate not only the content of Mwana Kupona's poems but also the messages that she found fit for her daughter. The oral nature of Mwana Kupona's community is demonstrated by the author's implied suggestion that instructions may be delivered more clearly through recitation of songs or poems rather than using simple grammatical sentences. Even after she finished writing her poem, Mwana Kupona recited the whole to her daughter. "As her mother sang the last syllable of her poem, Mwana Hashima gazed at her, transfixed. She loved to hear her melodious voice, and felt the lessons sinking deeply into her heart" (105).

Songs are also used in Dedan Kimathi's biography. At the beginning of the biography Njeng'ere presents a situation where grandmother goes to show her grandchildren a *Mugumo* tree, fig tree, where Kimathi used to pray, which has recently been declared a monument by the government. But grandmother is carried away by memories of the past and she sings the following song about Kimathi:

Riria Kimathi witu ambatire kirima-ini kia Nyandarua
Nietiirie hinya na umiriru
Wakuhoota nyakeru

When our Kimathi ascended Nyandarua Mountains
He prayed for strength and courage
To defeat the white man … (2).

Introducing a song at this stage of narration demonstrates Njeng'ere's reliance on Kikuyu oral traditions in the narration of Kimathi's story. It is activities that are taking place in the present like honouring of Kimathi, which trigger grandmother's memory concerning Kimathi and the Mau Mau. In his anthropological study of the Kikuyu traditions in *Facing Mount Kenya*, Jomo Kenyatta (1938) posits that songs and dances were very significant in the Kikuyu traditions, for it was through the words, phrases and rhythmic movements of the songs and dances that news was passed across to people, including the laws of the society (193). These songs and dances, Kenyatta says, were part and parcel of the Kikuyu way of life. Through the song she sings, grandmother evokes a communal memory – of the Mau Mau and the fight against the white man - *Wakuhoota nyakeru*. This song, one could argue, calls upon a collective identity of those who were involved in the Mau Mau. The song mentions Kimathi who is used here for the purpose of narrating the collective experience. Njeng'ere incorporates this song, not only as a show of grandmother's memory of Kimathi, but also as a means of figuring Kimathi as a person who was prayerful – *Nietirie hinya na umiriru*. Therefore, the song is also used for character development in the text.

The songs in Kimathi's biography further show the invocation of a group identity of the Mau Mau. Group identity forms part of community identity, which can also be called ethnic identity. This community or ethnic identity is exemplified in the text by the kind of songs that the author shows were famous among the Mau Mau freedom fighters, some of which were in prayer form:

Wee Ngai wa Kirinyaga,	Oh God of Kirinyaga
We mugai wa magai	you are the giver of all blessings
Turathimage riu na hindi ciothe	because you are our creator
Na ugituhe bururi wa Gikuyu na Mumbi	and you gave us Gikuyu's and Mumbi's land (65).

This song is a kind of prayer by the Mau Mau fighters, which calls upon the Kikuyu common ancestry to legitimize their belonging to the land that the community was given by God of Kirinyaga through their first parents, Gikuyu and Mumbi. Land here invokes a common ancestry. And as James Ogude puts it, "this natural process of land acquisition, through a filial bond with the spiritual guardians of land as the ancestral spirits, is one form of creating collective identity" (1999: 90). Identifying with the ancestors links the characters to this past and to presumably an imagined ethnic identity. In *Facing Mount Kenya*, we read that according to the Kikuyu tribal legend,

> the Man Gikuyu, the founder of the tribe, was called by Moigai (the divider of the universe), and was given his share of land. … At the same time Moigai made a big mountain which he called Kere-Nyaga (Mount Kenya), as his resting-place when on inspection tour, and as a sign of his wonders. …Moigai had provided him with a beautiful wife whom Gikuyu called Moombi (creator or moulder) (Kenyatta, 1938: 3-4).[6]

Being God's resting place therefore, Mt. Kenya becomes the centre of the Gikuyu nation. It was also looked upon as a source of inspiration through prayer. The Mau Mau saw Ngai as the only way through which the land would come back to its original owner; the house of Mumbi, which basically refers to the whole Kikuyu nation. Phaswane Mpe argues that songs serve several ideological as well as political intentions – they are often used by characters to strategically position themselves for political negotiation and conflict resolution (1996: 56). In the case of the Mau Mau, many of their songs were to legitimize their stay in the forest; the reason for their fight and their "hoped" achievements. These songs that evoke Kikuyus' common ancestry

[6] See Egara Kabaji, (2000: 5-7) for a similar story.

are significant in the text, as they enhance not only spiritual unity but also communal unity.

Kirinyaga (Mt. Kenya) was very significant in all the Kikuyu prayers as it was their God's dwelling place. For example, the narrator in Kimathi's biography says that before she started off her journey into the forest where she had to take a letter to Kimathi, Waigua, an elderly man, together with her [the narrator's] mother prayed to Ngai to guide her through her journey. So they all turned towards Mount Kirinyaga and prayed:

> May Wangu reach her destination without being seen by an enemy….
> *Thaai Thathaiya Ngai Thaai*
> May her mission be completed successfully
> *Thaai Thathaiya Ngai Thaai*
> May she come back to us unharmed
> *Thaai Thathaiya ngai Thaai*
> (13).

The words "*Thaai Thathaiya*" are beseeching words that are directed to God (Ngai). The idea of memory and common ancestry is invoked through the adoration of the God of the Gikuyu. The recital of such prayers that were common in Kikuyu's past history is again read as an insertion of orality into the text and an invocation of the group identity. In the words of Karin Barber, "the past is recreated to provide the ground for an act of reconstitution of identity" (1997: 6). Sometimes people feel the need to reconstitute identity especially in the face of external threats of power that threatens its being and authority. The Kikuyu African leadership and authority was at the time of Mau Mau being threatened by the intrusion of the colonialists' power and therefore there was need to reconstitute their identity through such songs. It is for the same reason that popular songs tend to emerge during many liberation struggles**.**

Apart from songs that were in prayer form, Njeng'ere shows that Mau Mau songs were also composed to celebrate victory in the fight or an expedition. Sometimes such songs could be sung even when the fighters had not been engaged in any expedition – just to give them courage and hope for success. Wangu identifies the following song as one of her favourites among those that she and other Mau Mau fighters sung when she visited the forest:

Tuthiaga tukenete	We always go out happy
Tugacoka tukenete	We always come back happy
Rugendo rwitu rwari rwega	Our journey was fruitful
Tugithii na tugicoka	As we went and as we came back

(66).

While this song expresses the Mau Mau success in their missions of whatever kind, it can also be read as having been used strategically by Njeng'ere to refer to the success of Wangu's mission into the forest. Wangu carries a letter from the Kikuyu village reserves to the forest, where she spends one night with the fighters and returns home the following day. She sung Mau Mau songs with other women fighters with whom she spent the night. This song can therefore be read as one of the avenues that Njeng'ere uses in the narrative to demonstrate the success of Wangu's mission.

Cristiana Pugliese (2003: 113) asserts that the earliest political songs associated with the Mau Mau were composed around 1948 by the landless Kikuyu settled by the colonial government at Olenguruone, in the Rift Valley. Many of these songs, she says, denounced their hardships and expressed open opposition to the colonial government. Mau Mau fighters used to travel from their hiding places to the edges of the forest where they got food and other war weapons. After successful expeditions songs [and prayers] were used for celebration of their victory and also to thank their God [Ngai]. In many of

these songs "[t]hey stressed the importance of hard work and unity, and emphasized that God was on the side of the Kikuyu and would finally grant their demands" (Pugliese 2003: 116). Wangu informs readers that songs also kept the Mau Mau women fighters lively in the night until sleep caught up with them because it was very cold in the forest (66). Bildad Kaggia (1975) in his autobiography argues that Mau Mau songs and other songs sung during agitation for freedom in Kenya were useful as they carried the message of African grievances and aspirations to many parts of the country. Such songs were also popular in detention camps and prisons. Thus we realise that the use of song in the act of narration may have many meanings including evocation of identity, as a means through which the narrative unfolds, and also as a means for passing messages to the audience.

While Mau Mau songs were useful in many ways discussed above, one shortcoming of these songs was that many of them were in the Kikuyu language, which exclusively limited their circulation, because without translation other ethnic communities could not sing them with conviction as national freedom songs. It is for this reason I argue that such songs mostly evoked the Mau Mau group identity which was generally composed of Kikuyu community and parts of Embu and Meru. In fact, these songs rarely spread to other communities.

In the case of the Bukusu tradition, Alembi shows that songs are important in praise of the good, or heroes in the society. In the course of her narration of Elijah Masinde's story, grandmother announces that she and her audience should take a break by singing a song. Nanjala [one of the children in the audience] then starts the following song and the rest take it up:

Mwana mbeli beyaye!	First born oh yee!
Mwana mbeli….	First born….
Beyaye!	Oh yee!

Mwana mbeli nesiekhoelo!	First born (is source of) pride!
Mwana mbeli Elijah	First born Elijah
Mwana mbeli	First born
Elijah!	Elijah!
Mwana mbeli nesiekhoelo!	First born (is source of) pride!

(17).

The song [*Mwana mbeli*] is basically sung at the birth of a child in the Bukusu/Luhya tradition.[7] It recognizes entry into motherhood category by the woman who has given birth. The song signals fecundity and the start of motherhood so it can be sung when a child of either sex is born. This song may however be sung at the birth of any child, but the emphasis here is not in the series or the signification (fecundity) since that has been proved. Instead it signals joy in another arrival which suggests a kind of security in terms of defence in case of war, insurance against hunger because the child will produce and feed the family/clan, or source of wealth if a girl – through bride wealth. However *Mwana mbeli* can be sung to express pride in an act of valour or any other act by the child or any member of the family or the community which either brings pride to the family, saves the community/family from some tragedy like killing a leopard (a threat to the security of the community), or does anything that improves the wellbeing of the family and of the community. Sometimes it can also be sung for initiates who have shown courage during circumcision, amongst other uses.[8] In the context of the text, *Elijah Masinde: Rebel with a Cause*, the song is used to praise Masinde who fought injustice. Nanjala quickly draws from her cultural praise songs and immediately applies the song to Masinde's context who to that end in the

[7] Thanks to Mr. Kweya for the information on this song and the translation.

[8] This fluidity of the use of *Mwana mbeli* has seen the song featuring in contexts outside the Luhya tradition including Kenya's School Drama Festivals. This song has moved beyond the confines of the Abaluhya localities to other parts of the country, sometimes even acquiring words in other languages. The song has long crossed the threshold of ritual performance and has become almost like an entertainment song, outside the confines of the Luhya tradition. This shows how the meaning of this song has kept shifting and adapting to new environments.

narrative is identified as a hero. This song is therefore incorporated in the structure of the narrative for the purpose of perpetuating the theme of heroism – to praise the achiever. The song evokes the cultural practices of the Bukusus, whereby the do-gooders were praised. Songs introduced in the act of narration do not only encourage participation, and thus comprehension of the narrative, but they also enrich children's stories, making them more interesting (Derek Nkata, 2001).

From the foregoing, it is right to argue that songs serve various purposes in the texts under discussion. Their incorporation in the structure of the narrative help in perpetuating the themes, character development, and as a means of passing lessons to the readers. We have also seen that in the context of the communities from which each of the personalities hails, songs and dance are used for purposes like thanksgiving, political awakening and as a means of recognising heroes. In addition, these songs evoke identity of different groups of people. The different purposes to which these songs are put in their specific communities signal what I call cultural diversity. Many songs in African oral tradition contain proverbs and sayings which are words of wisdom that figuratively help to pass the message to the audience. However, sayings and proverbs are not used exclusively in songs. In the texts under study they are incorporated in the narrative structure to teach specific lessons. In the next part of the discussion I examine the use of sayings and proverbs in the written text.

Sayings and Proverbs

Proverbs and sayings contain condensed experience of any society's past generations. They therefore portray the richness of African oral traditions. Proverbs may reflect and express different aspects of the same problem depending on the society, and this makes it difficult to understand certain proverbs without the ethnographical background of the societies from which they emanate. Therefore it is only by placing a given proverb in its cultural

background that we can understand its meaning, and thus gain insight into different people's ways of life. Sayings and proverbs are social phenomenon, and as such, they can be defined as messages coded by tradition and transmitted in order to evaluate and/or effect human behaviour. They can also reveal elements of culture such as morality or what is considered to be the appropriate behaviour.

In *Dedan Kimathi: Leader of the Mau Mau*, Njeng'ere shows that Kimathi learnt many societal matters from his grandmother. When she was about to die she called Kimathi and told him:

> The time has come for me to go and plant cassavas. And when I am gone I want you to take good care of your mother and your siblings. And remember everything I have taught you (45).

My interest in this quotation lies in the phrase "the time has come for me to go and plant cassavas". I read it as an element of orality in the text, because it is a euphemism, that refers to death among the Bantu especially those who live around the Mt Kenya region. The restriction of the use of certain words within a specific locale intimates ethnic identity because like national and communal identity, ethnic identity "is contingent and relational: it is defined by territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation; the other" (Keith Grint 2000: 8). Identity is therefore viewed as constructed and not discovered.

In Mwana Kupona's biography proverbs are also seen as a cultural resource of the Swahili culture, some of which are found in *Khangas*, colourful patterned cloths used as wrap-arounds by women. Some of these include: *Mapenzi ni kikohozi, haiwezi kufichika* [love is like a cough, you can't hide it] (24) and *Akipenda chongo huita kengeza* (27), literally meaning one who loves mono-eyed man does not notice the fault but calls it a squint – referring to the

apparent "blindness" of love. Love is further referred to in one of the songs sung at Zuhura's wedding. One song refers to love [*mapenzi*] as a wound [*donda*] in the heart, and when love enters into the heart one cannot hold it anymore (40). Wedding songs with such sayings explain that when two decide to get married, they want to announce their love for each other openly to the whole world. The use of symbolic language which I read as signalling a cultural resource becomes clear during negotiations for Zuhura's wedding. She is referred to as a seed which the possible in-laws needed for planting (20). In this case Zuhura is a seed that will, may be, not only bear children but also be productive in many other ways while at the in-laws' place. The use of proverbs and symbolic language demonstrates the rich culture of the Swahili that King'ei draws from. In this text the importance of proverbs as a means of communication among the Swahili people is emphasized.

Alembi draws from the Luo tradition and utilises a few proverbs in *Jaramogi Oginga Odinga*. Grandfather, for instance, whom Alembi uses as his mouthpiece writes to Martha, his granddaughter, and tells her:

> In those days there were no formal schools as you have today. But the education children received through songs, riddles, proverbs and stories was very powerful. It would influence the actions of a child through his or her whole life. For example to a young man who seems to be giving up, we may give the following advice*: Kinda ne omiyo Opuk oyombo Apuoyo*, that is, persistence led the tortoise to victory over the Hare (2004: 20-21).

The narrator here not only employs proverbs in the narration, but he also explains the use into which oral art forms like proverbs, riddles and songs were put. The proverb used in this quotation explores the meaning and value of hard work and determination, and also draws attention to orality as a didactic instrument. A proverb with similar meaning will most likely be

found in many other African communities, although it may be in different words, since the value of hard work is not exclusive to the Luo. But Alembi shows that as much as proverbs encouraged people to work hard, they were at the same time useful in warning people against overworking, which sometimes may lead people to perform tasks carelessly. For instance, the proverb "*Jarikni jamuod nyoyo gi kuoyo*, the person who eats too fast will end up eating the stones" (Alembi 2004: 39), is used for the purpose of giving such warnings. Proverbs among the Luo and other communities are therefore seen as important cultural reservoirs, which like songs and stories, are useful for societal education and other purposes. Their deployment in some of the texts under study serves a useful purpose of educating the young about the cultural wisdom of different communities. These oral elements also draw attention to the nature of these societies in which work and perseverance are valued. Another element of orality deployed in the texts under scrutiny which is very common in narration of heroic narratives is the fantastic which I now discuss.

The Fantastic

I have said earlier in this thesis that the texts under study tell stories of historical personalities who are perceived as national heroes. In this part, I read the fantastic as a narrative device that is used for the purpose of elevating certain characters to a heroic stature. Richard Mathews (2002) argues that although it is difficulty to precisely define literary fantasy, "most critics agree that it is a type of fiction that evokes wonder, mystery, or magic – a sense of possibility beyond the ordinary, material, rationally predictable world in which we live"(1). Mathews reiterates that as a literary genre fantasy is best thought as a fiction that elicits wonder through elements of the supernatural or impossible. It consciously breaks free from mundane reality (2). The fantastic therefore accepts the magical, the non-rational, and the impossible world of imagination.

Ezekiel Alembi employs the element of the fantastic by elevating Elijah Masinde to a symbol of determination for his people and treating him as having power beyond the ordinary. Masinde gets in touch with the ancestors, who "ask him to bring back the Bukusu way of worship, *Dini ya Musambwa*, the religion of ancestors (33). Consequently Masinde fights against colonial and foreign Christian influence in order to sustain his traditional religion. Religion is seen in this text as one of the ways through which people fought for independence. It is invoked as a means of truth-claiming and asserting the rightfulness of African religions in comparison with colonialists influence. What makes Masinde to occupy the realm of the fantastic is the power he apparently possesses, through his religion. The narrator says that Masinde,

> … could walk through walls…. When he was fighting against injustice he was locked up in prison…. The prison wardens would lock up all the prisoners at night. But before the guards opened the doors in the morning, Masinde would be outside frolicking in the early morning sun! And the doors would still be securely locked (28-29)…. Masinde had magical powers. Not only could he go through stone walls but he could even transform bullets into water! (41).

Alembi employs the fantastic in many instances in the novel, which continually blurs the line between the real and the surreal (Julien 1992: 147). The fantastic defies our sense of the ordinary and the accepted system of logic (Kunene 1989: 186), and allows us to enter into infinite possibilities. Kunene argues that the fantastic is used a great deal in didactic writing "in order to add to the persuasive power of the message or to enhance the dramatic impact of words, or both (180). Alembi employs various elements of the fantastic in various instances in Masinde's story. For instance, we are also told that Masinde played his guitar while seated in the river where the water was swiftest (26-27). And in addition, he was a good footballer, and one day he kicked the ball upwards and it never came back (24). Actions like kicking a

ball or playing a guitar are ordinary but they assume a fantastic significance when they depart from their common predictable patterns. These actions, as Kunene would say, are based on ordinary things, yet ordinary things behaving in extraordinary ways (1989: 187). Thus for example playing a guitar is ordinary but playing while sitting in the middle of the river where the water is swiftest is strange. The fantastic, Kunene agues, is often regarded as being more persuasive in motivating a character to action than the ordinary logical events (1989: 187). It tickles and captivates children because of the incongruence and unexpected situations in life and people's action. The presentation of Masinde as an extra-ordinary person therefore helps to keep the audience active/involved and triggers children's delight and imaginative faculties. Alembi's use of the fabulous in this narrative, one could argue, helps to create some kind of shock in the minds of the young readers. This approach defamiliarizes Masinde and places him in a realm where we can only look up to him as source of power, ability and triumph. As a result in many instances in the text, all the children want to be called Elijah Masinde (see pages 9, 12-13, and 19). The use of the fantastic in this text therefore helps develop the storyline and theme – presenting Masinde as a hero. The fantastic however is not Alembi's own creation. Instead, he draws on the folklore narratives about Masinde and presents this picture to children.

In the instance where Alembi presents Masinde as having walked out of the prison cell while the gates were still locked, we read some intertextuality with Ngugi's *Matigari*. The character Matigari ma Njirungi in Ngugi's text is delivered from the locked cell by "strange powers". In the case of Matigari, we know that Guthera, the prostitute, offered herself to the prison guard so that he would fall asleep. Subsequently Muriuki took the warder's keys and opened the cell door to allow Matigari and the others in the cell to escape. However, in the case of Masinde, Alembi completely mythologizes his character without any interjection to explain Masinde's actions. In this story

we witness how myths are made and how they grow. Alembi imaginatively transforms Masinde's story into a Bukusu legend in the eyes of the readers.

The fantastic is further employed in Jaramogi Oginga's narrative, where like Masinde [although Masinde's power was through religion], Jaramogi Oginga performed deeds that made him unique:

> … [P]eople used to say that they had to be careful about what they said, because Jaramogi could be listening. He would change himself into a fly on the table and listened to everything that was said! …. [He] could even turn himself into soap suds! He could be anywhere…. Whenever he pointed his walking stick at someone, something terrible would happen to that person that day. This man was powerful (12-13).

The fantastic helps to show the influence Jaramogi and Masinde had in their communities, the more reason they were viewed as holding power over other people thus becoming models in their communities. In the two biographies the fantastic is employed purely for thematic purposes – to portray the heroic endeavours of the characters. Although it is clear that Alembi utilises such a technique to endear the character in the eyes of the reader, it is also true that such a technique signals how far writers can be influenced by oral traditions.

Conclusion

Acting as the focal point of this chapter, orality has been examined in order to show how the authors invoke specific community identities. These identities have in turn been read as communicating the authors' agenda of showing cultural diversity in Kenya as a nation. The use of oral art forms in the texts under study has also been seen as important in summoning literature from different cultural backgrounds, and also an important part in the unfolding narrative structure. Thus, Orality has been read as aiding the authors in

furthering the themes in the texts. I conclude that the stories of these personalities form part of cultural history of the communities from which they come. And unless this history is recorded so that the coming generations can have access to it, it is doomed to remain an artefact of one society and may in the end disappear. These narratives therefore perpetuate the names of these people and their communities' history because as Chinua Achebe reminds us in *Anthills of the Savannah*, "it is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. [That]… the story outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighter" (2001: 119). And as Liz Gunner (1999) argues, the calling upon the former distinct national figures makes it possible to put into account the history and traditions of all communities that form the nation (54). From this discussion, we realize that children's literature is a means to promote understanding and it gives children experiences from different communities. This understanding of different backgrounds then helps them [children] to know how to live in a culturally pluralistic nation. Cultural diversity in children's books is important because it provides a means for socialization through which children can understand themselves, their culture and others (Glazer 1997: 24). The texts demonstrate that children's literature is an avenue that gives children cultural experiences different from their own.

The rest of the chapters in this thesis attempt to show the shifts that children's literature in Kenya adopts in the twenty first century, through the interrogation of the heroic character, the styles that are used in the texts and the themes they address. In Chapter Three I discuss gender stereotyping in children's literature, and how the female figure is accorded a heroic stature, not only in children's literature but also in Kenyan historiography.