

**FORM IN CONTEMPORARY WRITING ON YOUTH IN KENYA:**

**A READING OF THREE SELECTED NOVELLAS**

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**A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF  
ARTS IN LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

**2016**

## DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university:

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to the late Mr.Peter and Mrs.Monica Mukunga M' Linguya,

Who are the source of my inspiration, Sabina Karimi my love,

Mukiri, Waridi and Karen, I treasure you my daughters.

And to God Almighty my source of help and strength.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This research project would not have been successful without the dedicated and consistent guidance of my supervisors, Dr. Jennifer Muchiri and Prof. Alina Rinkanya. I also thank the lecturers in the department of literature for providing me with a strong knowledge base in the course of my studies.

I also thank my colleagues Tonney, Rosemary, Wanjohi, Abdiwali Sheikh, Aru, Janet, Andrew, Mweleka, Pheris and Penina for your moral support in the course of our studies.

To my staff mates Charles Kibore, Mwenda Kanyi, Eric Muthamia, Mwetii Thumatia, Florence Makena and Moffart Njue for your genuine support and encouragement. To Mutuma Mwereria, thank you for your generosity. Finally to Karimi, Mukiri, Waridi (Wa), and Karen (Chapuu) for allowing me the space, time and peace required to study.

## CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem .....	7
1.3 Objectives.....	8
1.4 Hypothesis.....	8
1.5 Justification .....	8
1.6 Literature Review .....	11
1.6.1 Works on Literary Theory .....	11
1.6.2 Works on Teenage Psychology.....	15
1.6.3 Reviews of the Texts Selected for the Study .....	16
1.6.4 Works on the Reflection of Problems Affecting Youth in Kenyan/ East African Literature.....	19
1.7 Theoretical Framework .....	20
1.8 Methodology .....	24
1.9 Scope and Limitation .....	24

**CHAPTER TWO: THE USE OF FORM IN THE EXPOSITION OF IDENTITY  
CRISIS AMONG THE YOUTH IN ELIZABETH KABU'S WAS NYAKEERU MY  
FATHER?.....25**

2.1 Introduction .....	25
2.2 Synopsis .....	25
2.3 The Development of Plot .....	26
2.4 Characters and Characterization.....	35
2.5 Stylistic Devices used in the Story .....	53
2.5.1 Dialogue.....	53
2.5.2 Description.....	59
2.5.3 Rhetorical Questions.....	62
2.5.4 Imagery .....	67
2.6 The Narrative Voice .....	70
2.7 Conclusion.....	76

**CHAPTER THREE: THE USE OF FORM IN NARRATING THE QUEST FOR  
UNITY IN ANTHONY MUGO'S ASK THE STARS.....77**

3.1 Introduction .....	77
3.2 Synopsis .....	77
3.3 Plot Development.....	78
3.4 Character and Characterization .....	84
3.5 Stylistic Devices used in the Story .....	100
3.5.1 Flashback.....	100
3.5.2 Proverbs.....	102

3.5.3 Imagery.....	106
3.5.4 Description .....	110
3.6 Conclusion.....	113
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: THE USE OF FORM IN REVEALING THE EFFECTS OF DRUG ABUSE IN MORAA GITAA’S THE SHARK ATTACK .....</b>	<b>115</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	115
4.2 Synopsis .....	115
4.3 Plot Development.....	116
4.4 Character and Characterization .....	119
4.5 Stylistic Devices Used in the Story .....	126
4.5.1 Description.....	126
4.5.2 Dialogue.....	131
4.5.3 Code-Switching.....	134
4.5.4 Embedding .....	137
4.6 Conclusion.....	140
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>	<b>143</b>

## **ABSTRACT**

The study examines how Elizabeth Kabui in *Was Nyakeeru Father?*, Anthony Mugo in *Ask the Stars* and Moraa Gitaa in *The Shark Attack* employ form to explore contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya. The study focuses on the analysis of the three selected texts using parameters of form that characterize prose fiction such as: the development of plot, characterization, stylistic devices used in the story as well as the narrative voice to develop the themes of identity crisis among the youth, quest for unity and the effects of drug abuse among the youth in Kenya today. The study concludes that literature depends on its formalistic appeal in tackling the subject matter.



## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

Form involves critical analysis of structural and literary aspects in a given text in order to explore the subject matter or content. In other words form in literature is a holistic depiction of aesthetic quality of a text. Its point of focus is the creativity and the ingenuity the author deploys in the process of producing a literary text. In other words, form examines how authors manipulate words in their creative process to come up with a literary text conforming to a certain genre. In terms of creativity, literature is not different from other arts such as sculpture making, modeling, montage, collage, or even drawing since all of them are a product of creativity and ingenuity.

In literature a writer uses words to create a text just the way a sculptor uses pieces of marble to come up with various forms of sculpture. The study of the way a writer uses words for creative purposes is what constitutes form in literature. This assertion is corroborated by Charles E. Bressler in his definition of form in *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* as “an analysis of a work’s constituent parts- its linguistic and structural features- or its form” (51). When analyzing a text through formalistic lenses, a critic will be involved in the examination of a work’s constituent parts such as plot, character choice, narrative perspective, as well as the “mechanics” of story-telling which include literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, dialogue, description, irony as well as diction. The critic is also required to examine the linguistic and structural aspects which include the syntax, semantics and morphological features. The holistic composition of the above aspects is what constitutes form in a literary text.

The study of form is very important in foregrounding the subject matter since the two are interrelated in the sense that through form we understand the content of a literary work. To show the interrelatedness of form and content, Mark Schorer in *The Word we Imagine* is of the view that:

When we speak of technique, then, we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and finally, of evaluating it. (3)

Following the observation above, I agree with Schorer in the way he demonstrates the relationship between form and content. Using Schorer's ideas I analyse form in the three texts to show how it has helped in exposition of contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya.

This research project examines form in contemporary writing from Kenya by analyzing Elizabeth Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*; Antony Mugo's *Ask the Stars* and Moraa Gitaa's *The Shark Attack*. All the three novellas were the winners of the 2014 Burt Award for African Writers, Kenya Chapter, with Kabui's scooping the best award, Mugo's the second prize and Gitaa's the third prize. Burt Award, according to the Canadian Organization for Development through Education (CODE), has existed from 1970. It started as an NGO by the name Overseas Book Centre. The NGO evolved with time and was renamed Canadian Organization for Development through Education in 1980. In its evolutionary path it was recognized by UNESCO and admitted into its fold in a consultative status in 2009S. Its foray in literature however dates back to 2008 when it awarded its first literary award in Tanzania

as indicated in the CODE's official website. From then it has been giving literary awards to writers on youth issues in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Ghana, Canada and the Caribbean.

In Kenya, the Burt Award is administered by the National Book Development Council of Kenya (NBDCK) in conjunction with CODE and the Canadian philanthropist Bill Burt. According to their official website, NBDCK is a visionary organization comprising of focused intellectuals with a noble mission of promoting readership and a reading culture in Kenya. This is in accordance with their goals and aspirations such as the recognition of excellence in young adult literature from Kenya. NBDCK also recognizes the need to address the acute shortage of supplementary reading materials in Kenya especially in the upper primary and secondary school levels. By filling this gap NBDCK is able to enrich learning at these levels by complementing class texts which mainly focus on syllabus coverage. Apart from widening the reading stock on English materials in schools and libraries, NBDCK also enhances the publication of books which help in strengthening the English language skills among the youth, hence fostering enthusiasm and a love for reading. Overall, NBDCK has immensely contributed to the wealth of Kenyan literature by stimulating and supporting the publishing industry through the awards it gives to various winners who get published every year. All the above information is contained in the codes official website; NBDCK/CODE-Official website.

To qualify for the award the books in consideration have to exhibit a high level of creativity in terms of language and form in a way that directly appeals to the youth. Through richness in form and aesthetics the books ought to excite the youths' affective as well as cognitive domains. Short of these qualities, the books will be boring and unwelcome to the youth who

are known to be highly impressionistic and brutally honest with whatever they read as echoed by Kabui's observation in her newspaper interview with Mwikali Lati that, "Children and young people are honest when it comes to books. They will not read a boring book. They would rather play or watch TV." (Mwikali Lati, Business Daily, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015). Therefore, this study explores the richness in form and aesthetics in the three novellas and how this helps in the exposition of contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya.

The three novellas, *Was Nyakeeru my Father? Ask the Stars* and *The Shark Attack* explore contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya. *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* revolves around the life of James Kirika, a fifteen year old boy thrust into the turbulence of identity crisis. His brutal encounter with fate happens when he inadvertently eavesdrops on his parents. On that occasion, he is poignantly struck by the realization that the man he has hitherto been calling father is not his biological father. Pursued by ceaseless trauma, he embarks on a relentless search for the elusive truth. More so, the book tackles other issues such as drug abuse, the case of absentee parents, failure to achieve in school as well as teenagers' quest for recognition.

Kabui is a prolific writer who has authored other books such *The Dumpsite Puzzle* (2010); *Bizarre Bazaar* (2011); *The Turning Point* (2007) and *The Prize* (2007). These are books with captivating stories on children's experience. *The Dumpsite Puzzle* is a children's book that narrates the life of two boys and their firsthand encounter with a crime gang. Their lucky escape is as hilarious as it is puzzling. *The Bizarre Bazaar* is a children's crime thriller which tells the story of two boys, Marto and Kelvin, whose adventure in a funfair leads them headlong into a kidnap and carjacking saga. *The Turning Point* tells the story of Patricia (Patti) and her struggle for personal acceptance as well as the recognition by others at school.

*The Prize* is also a children's book which revolves around the life of a girl by the name Lisa Wambui who is pursuing the elusive Noble Prize for peace after getting motivated by the story of Prof. Wangari Maathai--the first black woman to get such a prize.

Mugo is the author of the novella, *Ask the Stars*. He is also the writer of a semi-autobiographical novella, *Never Say Never* (2012) which won the 2012 inaugural Burt Award for African Literature. *Ask the Stars* revolves around the character of Titus Mutuiria who is entangled in an ugly web of identity crisis. He suffers as a result of rivalry with his siblings Njorua, Antonnina and Sarah. Titus realizes that the loving Muthuri Mukaru is not his and Sarah's biological father, whereas the patient Mutumia Mutana is not the biological mother to Njorua and Antonnina. This triggers an avalanche of fear, jealousy, sibling rivalry and fierce competition. The novella also tackles other issues such as teenage love-hate relationships, religion, rape and pornography, parents' corrupting influence on their children as well as talent development.

*The Shark Attack* by Gitaa revolves around the lives of young Kadzo, Kenga and Issa. The truant trio runs away from school and are ensnared in the habit of consuming and selling drugs for the mono-eyed drug lord alias Big Man. The novella also tackles other issues such as teenage truancy from school, irresponsible parenting, effects of poverty on young people, trauma as a result of accidents, courage in adversity as well as the quest for reform. Gitaa, has also authored *Shifting Sands* (2012), *Crucible for Silver & Furnace for Gold* (2008). *Shifting Sands* is a novel which traces the story of four girls, Kemunto (a Kenyan of African descent), Myra (also a Kenyan of African descent), Latifar (a third generation Kenyan Arab) and Shilpa (a third generation Kenyan Indian), as they mature into young ladies. It is a scintillating story where friendship is tested in the face of racial diversity and the resulting

tensions. *Crucible for Silver & Furnace for Gold* is a novel that centers around the story of Lavina an African woman living with HIV and Giorgio, an Italian man whom Lavina meets on vacation. It is a re-reading and re-writing of gender question in times of HIV.

Teenage is a stage where young people have not matured enough and therefore find it hard to cope with the social environment around them. This is the stage where they are at cross-roads, for they are neither regarded as adults nor children. This is the stage at which they are trying to extricate themselves from confusion and develop their own identity. How they navigate the various obstacles thrown at them by the forces of cruelty in the society, which include villainous adults, has the potential of either building or breaking them. Therefore, on the basis of their ability to overcome these problems, they either develop self-identity or become confused about their role in the society as posited by Sigmund Freud and expounded by Labina Lobo in her essay, "Sigmund Freud's Psychosocial Development Theory." This explains why teenage stage is often referred as the age of crisis which should be handled with care and cautiousness.

The study of form in literature is unique in the way it recognizes the distinct aspects that characterize the various literary genres. Since this project is concerned with the study of form in the three novellas, it will succeed in doing so by analyzing various aspects of form such as the development of plot, character and characterization, the stylistic devices used in the various stories as well as the narrative perspective; since these are the aspects that are unique to the prose fiction. Considering the various aspects in their own respect, we realize that critical analysis of plot development as an aspect of form is important in the way it helps in showing how conflict builds up and how it is finally resolved in the three selected texts. On the other hand, the study of character and characterization as an aspect of form has helped in

mirroring teenage experiences since the protagonists and many other characters in the three novellas are teenagers, whereas the unique setting shows how the contemporary issues tackled in the novellas reflect reality in the Kenyan society. Furthermore, the exposition of the various stylistic devices used is crucial in showing how the stories develop in the three selected texts. The stylistic devices used in the three novellas include: dialogue, code-switching, suspense, embedding, proverbs, imagery, flashback, rhetorical questions and description which are important aspects of defamiliarization that have helped in the foregrounding of the subject matter. The study has also interrogated how the writers' use of narrative voice through teenage perspective has helped in highlighting some of the contemporary issues that affect young people in Kenya.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Literature is fundamentally different from other discourses since its strength is grounded in its literariness and aesthetics brought about by the writers' use and manipulation of form. The three selected novellas *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, *Ask the Stars* and *The Shark Attack* explore issues that affect the youth in Kenya. The study, therefore, interrogates the authors' use of form in bringing to the fore various contemporary issues affecting youth in Kenya which are tackled in the three books. The study of these books is important in showing their contribution to the youth readership in Kenya.

### **1.3 Objectives**

This research was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the selected writer's views about issues that affect Kenyan youth today;
2. To identify and evaluate the effectiveness of the various aspects of form employed in the selected texts in exposition of the issues that affect the youth in the twenty first century.

### **1.4 Hypothesis**

This research project tested the following assumptions:

1. The writers have effectively and realistically captured contemporary issues affecting the youth in Kenya;
2. The writers have effectively used various aspects of form in the three selected texts which have greatly helped in revealing the various issues that affect the youth in the twenty first century.

### **1.5 Justification**

Young people are very important since they hold a key to the future of all the societies of the world. Investing in youth by any society is important in securing its own posterity. This is because young people are the leaders of tomorrow who own keys to Kenya's destiny. This group of people therefore requires good books such as the selected texts to ground them morally, socially, intellectually and to help them build a strong foundation in both spoken and written English. The three novellas are set in Kenya and published in twenty fourteen: hence the subject matter they tackle is a reflection of the contemporary issues that affect the youth of twenty first century in the country.



On the issue of form which captures the structural and stylistic aspects of a text, the stories in the three novellas are woven in simple yet captivating language to capture how contemporary youth in Kenya encounter and navigate issues that affect them. Since the three novellas are narrated through young peoples' perspectives, they offer vital lessons and moral clues to the young readers as they grapple with similar issues in their lives' developmental trajectory. It is on this basis that this project secures its relevance since it focuses on form in the three novellas to reveal the contemporary issues affecting the youth in Kenya.

All the issues addressed in these novellas are a reflection of the contemporary Kenyan society. This state of affairs corroborates the words of Reidulf Molvaer as quoted by JKS Makhokha in his PhD dissertation that:

Good literature reflects the life and spirit of a people. Writers hold a mirror up to their society. A society finds expression through its authors and in this way it is the co-author of literary works....In its literature and art a society reveals its 'soul.' (7)

It is very clear, therefore, that issues tackled in the three novellas are a reflection of the contemporary Kenyan society. Contemporary issues affecting the youth in Kenya are a result of societal negligence as various stakeholders such as parents, teachers, peer counselors, religious leaders shirk their responsibilities leaving young people in the hands of their peers who are also teenagers or opportunistic crooks in the society. This is because teenagers might end up misleading each other since they are less experienced on complex social matters. On the other hand criminals and crooks in the society might end up misusing these youths to advance their selfish interests.

The strength of the three selected novellas lies on their richness in form and content hence their aesthetic appeal. In this way, they help in the cultivation of enthusiasm, interest, a love of reading and reading culture among the youth. Recognizing the shortage of relevant supplementary reading materials among the youth, these books are important in augmenting the official syllabus and curricula requirements besides their importance in helping the youth develop competence in language skills. In addition, these books are important tools that serve as a moral and social compass. On the above bases the three novellas may act as benchmarks for other Kenyan writers who deal with contemporary issues affecting the youth.

Since the focus of this study is form in contemporary youth writing in Kenya, I have decided not to focus on the selected writers' other books due to their incompatibility with the set goals and objectives of this study. Gitaa's *Crucible for Silver & Furnace for Gold* and *Shifting Sands* are novels dealing with adult content through an adult perspective hence not compatible with the objectives of this project. Kabui's other books such the *Dumpsite Puzzle*, *Bizarre Bazaar*, are thrillers based on crime such as car-jacking, robbery and kidnap and written in simple but skillfully used language that is captivating to children but not compatible with this study whose focus is the study of form and how it helps in the exposition of contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya. Kabui's *The Turning Point* and *The Prize!* are class readers under the New Progressive Primary English Series fit for class five and six, respectively. The above are children's story books hence not compatible with this project in terms of scope and content since its main focus is the study of the issues that affect the youth. Therefore, a critical analysis of the three selected texts would greatly help in bringing to the fore the contemporary issues affecting the youth in Kenya.

## **1.6 Literature Review**

### **1.6.1 Works on Literary Theory**

To provide a context for this research, I have reviewed various works on form, contemporary issues on youth writing as well as writings on formalistic theoretical framework. All the literature reviewed has a bearing on this project and therefore serves as the fulcrum upon which this project is pegged.

This project owes its strength on form as its central point of focus. In his article, “On the Paradoxes of Form and Style,” Joseph Muleka asserts that form is simply, “a product of creative interpretation” (14). To authenticate his argument he quotes Tzvetan Todorov who posits that, “form lives through its alterations, called creations and recreations” (14). In this case Muleka agrees with Todorov on dynamism of form which hinges on the ingenuity and the creativity of both writers and readers in the discourse of creation and interpretation. Muleka’s views are important in the way they complement this project since their main emphasis hinges on the creative interpretation which is a vital aspect in formalism.

To show that form can be analyzed using definite tools (devices) just like in science, Bressler, is of the view that:

Each device or compositional feature possesses peculiar properties that can as in any science, be analyzed. ...this new science of literature became an analysis of the literary and artistic devices that the writer manipulates to create a text. (51)

This shows that a critical reader involved in formalistic analysis of a text needs to be versatile in the creative aspects of style such as imagery, symbolism, irony, parallelism and a host of others which constitute the literariness of a text. Bressler’s work is important to this project

since it emphasizes the scientific approach to literary interpretation. Using Bressler's views this project analyzes the selected texts as autonomous entities by looking at their form; that is the structural and linguistic aspects employed in a work of literature. Bressler's work is therefore important in the way it complements this project.

On his part Robert Di Yanni in *Research and Critical Perspective* is of the view that a work's greatness is determined by the creativity of the writer. This is the way a writer manipulates both linguistic and artistic tools to produce a literary text. On the basis of creativity Di Yanni is of the view that, "the greatest literary works are "universal," their wholeness and aesthetic harmony transcending the specific peculiarities they describe" (1581). Here, form is the king in determining the greatness of a literary text, its content and setting notwithstanding. Using Di Yanni's views this project analyses the selected texts using formalistic approach which emphasizes the artistic creativity in a work of literature.

In the study of form, a researcher engages in an in-depth analysis of structural as well as stylistic and the language aspects in a literary text. This claim follows after Emmanuel Ngaru's observation in *Stylistic Criticism of the African Novel* that in the analysis of a text, "One must concern oneself with the details of: grammar, lexis, phonology, meaning, as well as wider issues of deviation from the norm, character and the relationship between the author and the audience" (12). This shows that a critic or a researcher should conduct a forensic--like in-depth analysis of structural and stylistic features to show how they help in the exposition of the thematic concerns. Borrowing a leaf from Ngaru's observation, the study of form in the selected texts is important in the exposition of contemporary issues affecting the youth in Kenya. Ngaru's work is therefore important to this project for complementary purposes.

In *Style in Fiction*, Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short, concur with Ngara as their footing on the pedestal of language and form is similar. Their take is that:

...whereas in poetry, aesthetic effect cannot be separated from the creative manipulation of linguistic code, in prose it tends to reside more in other factors (such as character, theme, argument), which are expressed through rather than inherent in language. (2)

This shows that form and content in prose are inseparable since they are inextricably interrelated. Using the above views this project has analyzed the selected texts by looking at formalistic aspects such as characterization, plot development, the narrative voice and the stylistic devices used in stories. These are some of the aspects emphasized by Leech and Short. By doing so the analysis of formalistic elements has helped in bringing to the fore the contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya hence the importance of Leech and Short's work to this project for its complementary purposes.

Michael Meyer, in *The Bedford Introduction to Literature: Reading, Thinking and Writing*, gives us insightful ideas on character and characterization in a literary text and their contribution in the development of plot and themes. For instance, Meyer describes the characters' contribution to plot development by asserting that the, "... action of the plot interests us primarily because we care about what happens to people and what they do" (100). Borrowing from Meyer's description it is not a surprise that after reading a text, we tend to either identify with the characters by being sympathetic to their course or get disgusted depending on their actions, utterances and intentions. Character and characterization is one of the major aspects of form in the selected texts hence its centrality to this research.

Roberts V. Edgar and Jacobs E. Henry have profoundly studied form in, *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*. These authors have analyzed various aspects of form such as plot development, character and characterization, point of view, style and setting. Edgar and Henry's views are important to this study since its main assertion is that an in depth study of the above aspects is crucial for it gives a holistic perspective on form. Their views are very important for they give clarity and deeper understanding of form which is the focus of this study.

E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* is very significant in the way it gives us profound understanding of various aspects of form such as the stylistic devices used in the story, narrative dynamics, characterization, point of view as well as plot development. For instance, his description of the distinction between a story and a plot is pivotal to this study. Forster defines story as the arrangement of events in their time sequence (18), whereas plot is the narrative of events which recognizes time- sequence as well, but whose, "... sense of causality overshadows it" (60). The in-depth understanding of such aspects is primary to our study of form, which is the fulcrum upon which the research project hinges.

Narrative perspective is one of the major aspects of form. David Bergan and Daniel M. Epstein enhance our understanding of the various narrative perspectives in the way they distinguish them in *The Heath Guide to Literature*. For instance, Kirika is the protagonist in Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* Kirika narrates the story using the first person narrative voice. Bergan and Epstein define first person narration as a story, "... told by someone involved in the action of the story. They use the first person pronouns such as, 'I did this' or 'I saw that'" (22). The above definition is central to this study for its informative insight on form.

### **1.6.2 Works on Teenage Psychology**

The three selected writers have extensively dealt with contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya. The issues tackled in the three texts are narrated through the perspective of their young narrators. The experiences that the protagonists encounter have profound effects on their psyche and emotionality. "Working with the Emotionally Sensitive Adolescents: International Journal of Adolescence and Youth," by Michael F. Shaughnessy *et al* is crucial for its informative insight into the adolescent psychology and sensitivities. The protagonists in the three texts are young people in the throes of adolescence. Shaughnessy *et al* scholarly article is important for the way it enhances our understanding of the forces that inform the protagonists' behaviour, motivation and actions in the selected texts.

The protagonists in the three selected texts are young people in their teenage. Teenage is characterized by adolescent process of psychosocial development. This is the age of transition from childhood to adulthood which occurs between twelve to twenty one years. During this stage, young people develop a psychosocial complexity referred to as identity versus role confusion posited by ego-psychologist, Erik Erickson and expounded by Natalie Boyd in her scholarly essay "Erikson's Identity Versus Role confusion in Adolescent Development." In this article, Boyd explains Erikson's psychosocial stage of adolescent development referred to as Identity versus Role confusion. Youths who are successful at this stage, develop cohesive identities where they are sure about themselves and their place in the society. On the other hand, "... people who end up in role confusion often feel dissatisfied and kind of drift from one thing to another. They might have trouble figuring out what they want from life or relationships" (Boyd [www.study.com](http://www.study.com)). But most importantly, people in role confusion do not develop fidelity, which Erikson defined as being able to relate to people in a sincere, genuine way. Good relationships have a strong foundation of fidelity. The

understanding of these psychosocial processes is important to this study for they enable us understand the behaviour, motivation and actions of the protagonists and other youthful characters who are in this age bracket.

### **1.6.3 Reviews of the Texts Selected for the Study**

In his article, “Persistence Rewarded for Winners of Inaugural Burt Award,” which appeared in the Bill Burt Award web site, “Literary Prizes Foundation,” on September 28, 2012, Geoff Burt, the Burt Award founder's son gives a critical review of the books that won the inaugural Burt Award in the year 2012. The winning title was Mugo's, *Never Say Never*, followed by Edward Mwangi's *The Delegate* and Ngumi Kibera's *The Devil's Hill* which won second and third prize respectively. In his article, he highlights the importance of Burt Award in its contribution to the production of new books by promoting their publication and distribution to schools and libraries. Burt also highlights the intricacies and forces that inform publishing in Kenya. In his article he has succeeded in highlighting the frustration experienced by Kenyan authors who find it difficult to be published. Burt narrates how the award winning author, Antony Mugo had been writing manuscripts for over twenty years without winning publishers' approval, only for him to win the inaugural Burt Award in the year 2012. His streak of winning was again rewarded in the year 2014 when he won the Burt's second prize with his book *Ask the Stars* which is one of the primary texts that form the backbone of this project. This review is important in giving us the social historical background to the study. This kind of background is very relevant to the study since the three texts dealt with in this research are a product of the Burt Award. The information accruing from the article is important for giving us vital insights and for complimentary purposes.



Tom Odhiambo's critical review of Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* in his article, "Lecturer Wins Burt Award," appearing in the *Sunday Nation* of October 5, 2014, offers important insights into the major conflict, that is identity crisis, that inspires the forces at play in the text. Odhiambo also acknowledges the forces and the intricacies surrounding the publication of literary books in Kenya. From his interview with Kabui, Odhiambo narrates how Kabui's book had been turned down by a publisher only to be accepted by a different one upon the advertisement for manuscripts by Burt Literary Awards' foundation. Odhiambo also describes the objective of Burt Award as aimed at addressing the shortage of relevant quality books for young people in Kenya while at the same time promoting a love of reading and learning in the middle and secondary school levels. To qualify for the award the texts in consideration should be unequivocally thrilling to the youth in both form and content. The above take is a portrayal of how authors use technique which is an integral concept of form to create an aesthetically appealing text. This research argues that the study of form is the cog that helps us to foreground the contemporary youth issues espoused in the selected texts.

James Murua in his literary blog, "James Murua Literary Blog" which appeared on October 2, 2014, has reviewed Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* In his review, Murua gives insight into the Burt Award and its importance in the promotion of young adults' fiction in Kenya. He has also reviewed Kabui's novella by describing the tribulations that bedevils James Kirika, the protagonist, as he grapples with the pathos of identity crisis when he discovers that the man he has hitherto called 'father' is not his biological father. Murua however does not give consideration to form and how it helps in bringing to the fore the thematic concerns discussed in the novella. In recognition of his contribution, he has delved a little into the issue of characterization in the novella. The main argument in this study is that the in-depth analysis of form of which characterization is one of its aspects helps in revealing

contemporary issues that affect the youth including the identity crisis that bedevils them at this age.

Writing in the weekly literary column, “the Literary Postcard” that appeared in the Star newspaper on October 16, 2014, Khainga O’okwemba has given a critical review of Mugo’s *Ask the Stars* by focusing on the themes of sibling rivalry and rape orchestrated by the wayward rapist who happens to be the son of the area councillor. In the same breath, O’okwemba has analyzed Gitaa’s *The Shark Attack* by discussing the issue of drug menace as manifested in the book.

Writing in the online journal, “Mediamaxnetwork,” on February 15, 2015, Brian Mureithi, has critically reviewed both Kabui’s *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* and Mugo’s *Ask the Star* by focusing on some of the themes tackled in the two texts: the quest for teenage identity and sibling rivalry, respectively.

In a newspaper article, “Give your Loved one a Gift-Wrapped Book this Valentine,” that appeared in the *Saturday Nation* of February 14, 2015, Egara Kabaji has critically reviewed both Kabui’s *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* and Mugo’s *Ask the Stars* by highlighting the psychosocial importance of the books to the youth. In his article, Kabaji recognizes the fact that young people are bona fide members of the human society to whom the society owes its existence. Ironically, however the society we live in today is entangled in a myriad of upheavals that end up blemishing the lives of the youth. These problems include: moral decadency, drug abuse and the general disintegration of the society’s moral fabric.

Kabaji ascribes some of these problems to the advent of technology such the mass media (both print and electronic) and the online media such as the Face-book, Twitter and Whatsapp. Most of these media sources are littered with negative and immoral content that negatively impinges on the minds of the youth leading to psychological pain and trauma. Kabaji is therefore of the view that the two books are a kind of panacea for the negativity advanced by the media. To Kabaji, good books such as Mugo's are the best medicine to emotional wounds inflicted to the youth by the society. This is because good books act as an exemplary role model to the youth in the process of molding and growth. Kabaji's review of Kabui's and Mugo's books by outlining their psychosocial importance to the youth is very important for complementary purposes in this project.

#### **1.6.4 Works on the Reflection of Problems Affecting Youth in Kenyan/ East African Literature**

Vincent Odhiambo Oduor, in, "Style, Characterization, and Themes in Stephen Mugambi's Trilogy, *Wait for Me, Anjela, Walk with Me, Anjela* and *Stay with Me, Anjela*," (2012), has tackled the issue of education and girl child empowerment against the background of male dominance and chauvinistic prejudices. On the issue of form, this research is related to Oduor's work since he has analyzed some aspects of style such dialogue, the use of vivid description, diction and characterization. However he has not looked at other aspects of style such as rhetorical questions, proverbs, flashback, foreign language, dialectical inflexions, the art of embedding, the development of plot and the narrative voice which are some of the key aspects tackled in this project. This is one of the points of divergence between Oduor's work and this project.

Justus K. Makhokha, in his PhD dissertation, “Ethnic Identities and Gender Themes in Contemporary East African Literature,” (2011), has critically analyzed contemporary issues affecting various communities in East Africa. The issues dealt with by Makhokha such as ethnic identities and gender themes however, are adult oriented and complicated hence incompatible with the experiences of young Kenyans. His views on contemporary issues are however important to this study for enrichment and complementary purposes.

The importance of this literature review is to show the extent of critical studies in the field of form and contemporary issues especially those affecting the youth in Kenya hence the knowledge gap the study strives to fill. The review of literature reveals a dearth in critical and comprehensive studies on the three selected texts.

### **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

To articulate the set objectives, this study relied on Russian formalism and the theory of narratology. Russian Formalism refers to a set of ideas first advanced by the Moscow Linguistic Circle founded in 1915 by scholars such as Roman Jakobson, Jan Mukarovsky, Peter Bogatyrev and G.O Vinokur and also the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOYAZ) founded in St. Petersburg (Petrograd) in 1916 by Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum and Victor Vinogradov. These theorists were concerned with the method employed in the process of textual analysis in the exposition of textual meaning.

Formalism is a critical approach that almost exclusively focuses on the form of a literary work to the exclusion of biographical, historical, psychological, logical, social, political or ideological contexts in the determination of its meaning. One of the central tenets of this theory is the emphasis on the autonomy of literature as discussed by Bressler where he notes that, “The proper study of literature is literature itself. To study literature is to study poetics,

which is an analysis of a work's constituent parts – its linguistic and structural features – or its form” (51). This is where Russian formalists emphasized the study of literature using a scientific approach to literary interpretation. This process involves the analysis of a work's constituent parts which includes the structural and linguistic features to determine a work's literariness. Since formalism is concerned with a scientific approach to literary analysis, I have analyzed the three selected texts by focusing on formalistic aspects such as the setting, mechanics of plot, character and characterization, the internal dynamics of the stories as well as the narrative voice in an endeavour to highlight contemporary issues affecting the youth in Kenya.

Furthermore, Russian formalists were of the opinion that autonomy in literature is determined by the application of definite methods of analysis that seek to relate form and content in order to come up with a definite meaning. This observation is emphasized in Bressler's observation that “...Russian scholars boldly declared the autonomy of literature and poetic language, advocating a scientific approach to literary interpretation” (51). On the basis of this argument this research project has interrogated the three texts as autonomous entities irrespective of biographical, political, psychological or socio- historical consideration.

Formalists assert that:

a literary work exists independent of any particular reader--that is, that a literary work exists outside of any reader's re-creation of it in the act of reading; that the greatest literary works are “universal,” their wholeness and aesthetic harmony transcending the specific particularities they describe. (Di Yanni 1581)

This means that a reader's or a critic's opinion on a work of literature cannot affect its meaning and aesthetics when viewed through formalistic lenses since psychological, biographical, and social poetics consideration are inconsequential in formalistic approach to literary criticism.

The study also used the theory of narratology as a tool of analysis. This is a theory of narration propounded by scholars such as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, Irene De Jong, Peter Barry, Vladimir Propp among other narratologists. Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* defines narratology as “the study of how narratives make meaning, and what the basic mechanisms and procedures are which are common to all acts of story-telling” (145). Barry's definition owes its strength on the idea that the strength of narratology lies in the way it describes the nature of story as a concept and as a way of cultural practice. (145) Barry's views are important to this project in the way they help us understand how stories in the three selected texts are structurally and stylistically ordered and the methods used for their analysis. Barry's ideas are emphasized by Irene De Jong's in Jonas Grethlein and Rengakos Antonios' (ed). *Narratology and Interpretation: The content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature* observation that in characteristic style, narratology “allow(s) us to analyze literary texts in clear and unequivocal terms, much as linguists are won't to proceed, or heuristically to open up new roads of interpretation” (87). De Jong's observation is important to this study in the way it demonstrates the point of concurrence between formalism and narratology since the two critical approaches are concerned with as De Jong asserts, “clarity, precision and an analysis that avoids the mess of affective, ideological, subjective interpretation” (87).

On his part, Gerard Genette offers us important insights into how various aspects of narratology such as: the narrative modes, the narrative perspective, types of narrators, plot as well as the story are presented in a literary text. In doing so, Genette does not focus on specific narratives but on how they are narrated (Barry, 152). Narratology enabled me to identify the types of narrative perspectives in the selected texts. It also gave me insight into the structural ordering of the stories and how they are told in the three selected texts.

## **1.8 Methodology**

This research project attempts to exhaustively analyse the form in *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*; *Ask the Stars* and *The Shark Attack* to gain knowledge on the issues tackled in the texts. This is the fulcrum upon which the study hinges and forms the basis of my argument. I also read the authors' other works to establish their general literary philosophy as a basis for comparison. The study also embarked on the study of critical reviews on the three novellas to gain new insight and perspective on the texts. I also read other texts on youth literature and contemporary issues which formed a strong basis for complementary and vital insights into the selected texts. This study was guided by Russian formalism and the theory of narratology which together with other works on form and literary technique formed the basis for textual analysis of the selected texts.

## **1.9 Scope and Limitation**

This research focuses on Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my father?*; Mugo's *Ask the Stars* and Gitaa's *The shark Attack*. The three texts are the winners of Burt Award on contemporary youth writing in Kenya in 2014. In the three novellas I have interrogated the basic aspects of form which includes the dynamics of plot, character choice and characterization, the use of several stylistic devices, such as imagery, dialogue, description, proverbs, flashback, foreign language, embedding and the use used narrative perspective to how they help in the exposition of the subject matter.



## **CHAPTER TWO: THE USE OF FORM IN THE EXPOSITION OF IDENTITY CRISIS AMONG THE YOUTH IN ELIZABETH KABUI'S *WAS NYAKEERU MY FATHER?***

### **2.1 Introduction**

*Was Nyakeeru my Father?* is a novella by Elizabeth Kabui that deals mainly with the issue of identity crisis among the youth as reflected through the life of the protagonist, James Kirika. The novella is set in Kenya and was published in the year 2014 hence the issues tackled in the text such as Kirika's identity crisis is a reflection of some contemporary upheavals that bedevil the youth in Kenya. In this chapter I have critically analyzed the novella using parameters of form such as: the character choice, the plot, the narrative voice and some stylistic devices used in the story such as dialogue, description, rhetorical questions and imagery. This is because the above are formalistic aspects that are unique to prose genres.

### **2.2 Synopsis**

Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* is a captivating novella with a scintillating plot with both rural and urban setting. The story starts at the urban home where James Kirika's family lives since both parents work in the urban centre. It then heads to the grandmother's home at Sheeba which is some place in rural Kenya. The text narrates the story of James Kirika, a fifteen year old boy and his relentless search for identity. When Kirika inadvertently eavesdrops on his parents' conversation, he is thrown into identity crisis: for the conversation suggests that he is not the biological son of the man he calls 'Father'. Consequently, he engages in a relentless search for identity. In his endeavour to unravel the puzzle of identity, he gets the first clue from his aged grandmother who however dies before full disclosure leading to a complication. Later however, he realizes that he could have been mistaken when

he discovers that his father has been taking care of another young man by the name Ngece for the last fifteen years. This leads to a great relief for Kirika. Consequently, he reconciles with himself and his family.

### **2.3 The Development of Plot**

Plot is one of the most central elements of form in prose fiction. In a novella such as Kabui's, *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, plot is the way events are systematically ordered in a series of causes and effects. In other words, plot, unlike the story which outlines events in a chronological manner, owes its authenticity in the way it shows why things happens the way they do as opposed to the story which merely outlines how things happen. This observation concurs with Forster's definition of plot as, "a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality" (60). This means that unlike the story that merely recount events according to their chronological sequencing, a plot has to explain the reason why things happens the way they do.

It is through plot that the major conflict(s) unravel. This observation concurs with Carl E. Bain *et al* take that plot, "... usually involves conflict, a struggle between opposing forces..." (18). In this case it should be noted that the opposing forces might be external and/or internal. In Kabui's novella, the forces operating in the theatre of conflict are both internal and external. Internal in the sense that the forces are psychological in nature as they gnaw at the protagonist's psyche without the realization by other characters that he, Kirika, is burning in a kiln of psychological turmoil. On the other hand, forces impinging on the novella are external as they are embodied by other characters such as Kirika's father, old man Bernard and his son Zach, Nyakeeru (Mr.Wendo) and even Val who are akin to stumbling blocks to the

protagonist's peace and happiness. To solve the conflict, the protagonist has to navigate through the minefield of both external and internal obstacles in his search for identity.

The story in the novella starts by grounding itself in terms of temporal and spatial conceptualization. It starts by describing the first setting, which is Kirika's family's city home. More so it introduces us to the main characters in the novella' who are members of Kirika's immediate nuclear family. As the story begins, Kirika's family is engrossed in a flurry of activities as they embark on their journey to grandmother's rural home at Sheeba. This is the place where Kirika and the siblings spent their "August holidays for as long as I could remember. Mother and father would spend just a day and leave us children to spend the rest of the holiday at grandmother's" (1). To Kirika's parents and the extended family, this tradition was viewed as a very important social-cultural issue that would initiate the children and ground them in their cultural roots and heritage. This important undertaking is a panacea for rootlessness in modern Kenya where children, especially those in urban centers are completely uprooted from their social, historical and cultural heritage.

Furthermore, in the introduction, the main characters and their social interactions are introduced. It is through the family's social interactions that the main conflict emerges. Kirika, the protagonist, is thrown off his emotional balance after inadvertently eavesdropping on his parents' conversation. From their conversation, he realizes that his identity as a child within his family setting is at stake. Although the conversation comes to Kirika through chance occurrence, it is very hard to ignore for he had, "turned fifteen just a few months earlier" (2). That is why he is seen wondering, "Could father be referring to me? I wondered. I then recalled Father's disappointed look when I had handed him my school report form.... But then what had he meant when he said '... as though he were my son?' "(2). This episode

introduces us to the major conflict in the novella. It also turns out to be the puzzle that the protagonist will try to unravel as the novella unfolds. Whether he will succeed or not, that is the question the novella endeavours to tackle as the plot unfolds.

The journey to grandmother's rural home symbolizes a search of identity for Kirika and social-cultural rooting for his siblings (Vic and Penny). Throughout the journey, Kirika is depicted as immersed in his own world of anguish and violent psychic pain that erects a psychological iron curtain between himself and his family. Forlorn and desolate, he cages himself in a cocoon of loneliness and silence for he did not, " ... even want to talk. I just wanted to sit there and think over the predicament I had suddenly found myself in. But much as I tried to think, I thought of nothing else other than the fact that the man I had called father for fifteen years was not my father?" (7). Kirika's thought motif is a depiction of the psychic pain he is undergoing; for he is at the centre of identity crisis he has to solve to regain his biological heritage and sense of belonging which are at the core of his pride and self-value as a human being. In *Was Nyakeeru my Father*, identity crisis the protagonist suffers is to a large extent symbolic of a problem that affects a big number of youth in contemporary Kenyan society. Many a times this problem arises as a result of a host of factors which may include: premarital pregnancies, single parentage, abandonment of children by their parents and disintegration of families all which leave children to plough through the world without a sense of identity.

To unravel the mystery of identity, the Kirika is left with no option but to confront his mother head-on, an option he thinks best given his precarious situation. His direct question on identity coerces the worst concern from his mother who thinks that the protagonist could be suffering from a kind of neurotic stress. Her concern is highlighted by her question when she

wonders, " 'How bad is your headache..., she probably thought I was running a fever and getting delirious" (12). To her mother, this is the most unusual question whose acidic edges tears at her like a bombshell. This aspect that characterizes the major conflict is however solved by the mother's candid answer that rests Kirika's ghosts of maternal heritage. At least he is not an adopted child. However the puzzle of his paternal heritage hovers over his head like the sword of Damocles and cries for resolution. This is the answer he sets out to unearth.

The clue given by the mother takes the protagonist to Sheeba hospital formerly known as Ngrigasha hospital on a wild goose chase after his identity. Here Kirika takes us through a journey punctuated with nerve-wracking suspense, hope and disillusionment. The rough terrain within the corridors of the hospital is epitomized by the circuitous directions he gets from, " The watchman... of: 'turn left then right then right again and then you will see an iron door'" (41). These unclear directions get the protagonist all confused. He searches without success after which he concedes that by then, "... I was far back up the corridor and on my way out of the hospital" (42). His failure for the second time to unravel the puzzle of his identity creates a new twist in the suspense that informs the continuity of the plot. As the plot unfolds, Kirika encounters a substantial clue on his identity from his grandmother through her delirious apostrophe for in the presence of Kirika, the grandmother thinks that she is conversing with her late husband. In this 'conversation', she tells her 'husband' about Wario (Kirika's mother) and her situation that the protagonist thinks relates to her mother's past. For Wario had promised to:

...come but has not come yet... That daughter of ours- God has been kind to her... Her boy has grown big... he is almost a man now. I gave him the cow... That Nyakeeru who refused to take responsibility, he would be ashamed of himself if

he saw the boy. But he will see him one day for he is still here, in charge of the tea. Did he think we would not survive. Did he think that we would crawl on our knees?" (50-51)

This earth-shattering clue obviously re-energizes Kirika's search for his paternal roots. In this scenario, grandmother's apostrophe acts as an inadvertent symbol of revelation. It is through it that the shadowy character of Nyakeeru is revealed. It also introduces us to a new complication in the plot embodied by the character of Nyakeeru. Nyakeeru, whose nickname symbolizes very brown or white complexioned man, is the new puzzle that Kirika must solve to unearth his identity.

After sleepless nights of harrowing psychological torment, Kirika finally meets the said Nyakeeru (Mr.Wendo) in a fit of agonizing cross-purpose. Kirika's urgency to meet Nyakeeru contrasts sharply with the other's brutal avoidance. Kirika is just a boy who Nyakeeru takes for a miserable wretch searching for a job at the tea factory where he is the manager. He cannot fathom the audacity of the boy, for he thinks that Kirika is defiling his authority and class that derives from his hallowed position as a tea-factory's manager. Through vivid description, Nyakeeru's brutality descends on our consciousness like a thunderbolt. The protagonist graphically describes his meeting with Nyakeeru by demonstrating how he anxiously:

waited with baited breath as I watched the now familiar car approach. I ran to the middle of the road and frantically waved it to stop.... The driver's door opened and someone stepped out. It was Nyakeeru! It had to be him because he was of extremely light complexioned ... :What is the matter boy you want to die? Get off

the road ... Hakuna kazi?... He got back to the car swerved past me and drove off, a cloud of dust following him. (69-70)

This above graphic description, punctuated with dialogue between the protagonist and Nyakeeru, reveals the latter as brutally cold towards the youth he considers desperate and beggarly. The brutal encounter completely obliterates the protagonist's hopes of unmasking his eagerly sought paternal heritage. Furthermore, the encounter symbolizes the prejudice and malice that some contemporary leaders bear against the youth in Kenya. This is in the sense that some leaders who occupy various social, political and economic institutions Kenya, have a tendency to hog all the trappings of power and influence. On the other hand the youth are left wallowing in a state of powerlessness and abject poverty. This is one of the contemporary issues that Kabui strives to address in *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*

Although Kirika is completely deflated by Nyakeeru's brutality, his tenacity is revealed by his relentlessness in search for identity. Kirika is not the kind of person that gives up so easily; he traces Nyakeeru's house by cunningly befriending the latter's daughter, Stacy Wendo. In this endeavour, his plans however backfires as his quest to know who actually his father is turns to vengeful loathing which he unreasonably projects on Stacy Wendo, Nyakeeru's daughter. His new quest is revealed through his thought motif. As they were coming from the church, Kirika describes how he, "walked beside her wondering what next to say... I had no plan. All I knew was that I would make her pay for her father's deed" (80). Kirika's new purpose of intended revenge against Stacy Wendo is an indication of shifting goal posts. The obsessive pain he suffers as a result of his perceived bastard situation and the acrid brutality Nyakeeru directs at him when they meet face to face blurs his rational judgement where he perceives Stacy as a mirror image of Nyakeeru. To him, Stacy's persona represents Nyakeeru's

projection of himself and therefore his intended revenge on Stacy would be tantamount to punishing Nyakeeru, the object's father.

In a deeper sense, Kirika's quest for revenge is a reflection of the anger that afflicts many youths as a result of being neglected by the society. Consequently, they rebel against the society as a way of punishing it. This may result into delinquency. Through this novella, Kabui is therefore trying to highlight the effects of irresponsibility in the society which she views as a ticking time bomb waiting to explode if not ameliorated in time.

As the plot unfolds the events that follow throws us into a state of suspense since Kirika does not succeed in his mission for his holiday is cut short by his mother's insistence that the protagonist and his siblings go back to the city. Kirika tells us that his, "Mother called on Friday evening and told us we would be traveling back home the following day" (87). Consequently he does not get the opportunity to carry his vengeance.

With time and much introspection Kirika is seen almost abandoning his new found mission. On his journey home, he is seen saying in retrospect:

I had, realised that after my initial disappointment at not getting an opportunity to be alone with her, I no longer really thought of Mr.Wendo or of my bitterness and hatred towards him. Furthermore, I no longer connected Stacy to Mr.Wendo, and the urge for vengeance had greatly subsided. ... I kept wondering as we traveled back home. Would I still carry out my plan? (87-88)

The above introspection is a reflection of Kirika's change of mind.His dilemma on whether he would carry on with his malevolent mission is palpable. He is torn between his quest for revenge and the apparent change of heart which is evident in his utterance.



The story reaches the climax when the protagonist is attacked by a mob outside Mr.Wendo's compound where he had gone to search for Stacy to tell her about his paternal heritage. When he sees his brother however, he "started running towards him" (134). Since he was running, people must have thought him the criminal that must have bombed Mr.Wendo's home. Consequently they are seen raining kicks on him. This is graphically captured thus, "Someone else kicked me hard on the stomach and soon I could not tell where the kicks were coming from. Something dark covered my eyes, and for the pain I felt, I was certain it was blood. Soon everything was black" (135). The above episode is as climatic in nature as it is cataclysmic for the way it abruptly disrupts the plot as well as the lives of characters such as Kirika and Wendo. The incidence forces Kirika to abandon his revenge mission for he is hospitalized in a state of unconsciousness whereas Wendo is forced to resign from his job as a tea factory's manager and to move to a new corner of the country to avert future disaster. The episode causes Zach to undergo moral redemption for he is seen reporting one of his friends who had perpetrated the heinous crime to the police. Consequently, Zach turns way from the bhang smoking gang and is seen gearing for a positive change in life. At last he has attained personal identity and autonomy in life.

Kirika's discovery of his paternal identity marks the denouement in the plot development. This is after discovering that his father had been taking care of a young man by name Ngece for fifteen years. As a result, he is seen confessing:

For the first time it occurred to me that I could have been mistaken. Could my parents have been talking about Ngece?... Now at the end of that journey I had found my answer; I knew who my father was".(138)

It is at the end of book that he realizes his folly orchestrated by rash conclusions. He has now discovered for the first time that he could have been mistaken. This is the discovery that finally slays the dragon of his identity crisis.

Plot development is one of the important aspects of the novel since it chronologically outlines the events development in the texts and at the same time explains the reason as to why things happen the way they do. In Kabui's, *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* the plot is important in narrating the theme of identity crisis since it explains the protagonist's behaviour, motivation, intentions and his relationship with other characters. These are some of the factors that enhance the development of thematic concerns in a literary text.

Plot is very important in a literary text since as Baldick asserts, it helps in demonstration of how:

the pattern of events and situations in a narrative or dramatic work, are selected and arranged both to emphasize relationships—usually of cause and effects—between incidents and to elicit a particular kind of interest in the reader or audience, surprise or suspense. (195)

Using Baldick's observation we can assert that the plot in Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* has served to demonstrate the major conflict in the novella; that is identity crisis among the youth through the character of Kirika. Through plot we also see how other characters such as Kirika's father, Zach, Old Man Bernard, Nyakeeru contribute to the identity crises that affect the protagonist. On the other hand, the plot helps to show how characters such as Kirika's Mother, Aunt Shiku, Uncle Ken, The grandmother help to

mitigate the crisis that affect Kirika. It is through the actions of these characters and the role they play in the text that the theme of identity crisis among the youth is manifested.

## **2.4 Characters and Characterization**

### **Introduction**

Characters are virtual representation of people in a work of literature. They take a departure from real life since their role in representation is symbolic. The representation, however, ought to be as accurate as possible to mirror the real people and their engagement in societal dynamics.

The above assertion corroborates Roberts V. Edgar and Jacobs E. Henry's definition of a fictional character in *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing* as:

... an extended verbal representation of a human being-the complex combination of both the inner and the outer self. Through action, speech, description, and commentary, authors portray characters who are worthy caring about, rooting for, and even loving, although there are characters at whom you may laugh or dislike or even hate. (137)

The above definition is a true reflection of an actual society where characters represent actual people; some who possess heroic qualities and others who are out rightly villainous. On another angle some characters cannot be classified as either heroes or villain due to their ambivalent nature in terms of character traits and the role they play in a literary text. All in all, some other characters may undergo complete character transformation in the course of the story. Some of the characters who undergo complete character transformation include the protagonist where he abandons his revenge mission and accepts Peterson Ngece as his real

father. Zach also undergoes complete character transformation as is seen where he shuns the company of his bhang-smoking friends. He also vows to abandon the life drugs and pursue a health course such as rabbit keeping especially when he is promised financial support by Uncle Ken.

Characterization on the other hand, is the way a writer carefully combines fictional characters in terms of age, sex, salient character traits and then assigns them distinct roles in a work of literature. It is through this character composition that a writer is able to express his subject matter in a literary text. Characterization is a creative process that allows writers a high level of autonomy in the process of creating characters. This depends on a writer's own experience, aims and objectives, even whims as well as their imaginative genius. The above take marries with E.M. Forster's definition of characterization in *Aspects of the Novel* where is of the view that:

The novelist, unlike many of his colleagues, makes up a number of word-masses roughly describing himself, gives them names and sex, assigns them plausible gestures and causes them to speak by the use of inverted commas, and perhaps to behave consistently. These word masses are his characters. They do not come thus coldly to his mind, they may be created in delirious excitement, still, their nature is conditioned by what he gausses about other people, and about himself, and is further modified by other aspects of his work. (31)

Forster's description of characterization recognizes the idiosyncrasies that inform literary creativity. This is because characterization solely depends on the author's vision, objectives, experiences and imaginative prowess.

To start with, the character mosaic in Kabui's, *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* is a testimony to her creativity and ingenuity. To pass her message, Kabui settles on closely knit members of a nuclear family for her major characters. The nuclear family is, however, enmeshed within the fabric of the extended family that forms the background within which the minor characters are grounded. The main characters, being members of the same family, forms a composite unit whose lives are interwoven in such a way that they evoke obvious similarities and dissimilarities in a wide range of aspects. That they are members of the same family means that they are blood relatives with their relationship transcending social and filial bonds. Their lives are also inextricably interwoven since they occupy the same social and physical space. This filial inevitability is manifested where their lives are interlinked to such an extent that what one member does or utters has consequential effects on the other members of the family. This is exemplified by James Kirika's parents' private dialogue where we encounter the protagonist's mother telling her husband, "Bear in mind that whatever you do will affect all of us" (3). Her wife's words in the ensuing dialogue echoes the indispensability of all the family members since they rightly belong to that particular filial unit. Whatever affects one member has a reverberating effect on the whole family.

### James Kirika

The major action in the text revolves around the character of James Kirika, the protagonist. Kirika is a round character who acts as the fulcrum upon which the whole action in the novella revolves. At the age of fifteen, Kirika is the prototype representation of the youth in Kenya hence the problems he encounters is a reflection of the upheavals that bedevil many other young people in contemporary Kenyan society.

To start with, Kirika the protagonist is embroiled in a web of identity crisis as a result of his acrid sensitivity. When Kirika inadvertently eavesdrops on his parents' conversation, he is thrown into identity turmoil due to his sensitive nature. In the conversation, it is evident that Kirika's father is irked by the ingratitude of the young man he has been supporting for fifteen years. This issue is brought to us through the dialogue he had with his wife as he tells her:

I have taken care of this boy all these years as though he were my son, but he just keeps disappointing me...!How many years has it been...Fifteen! And every year he promises to improve. But you have seen for yourself; there has been no change!". (2)

The above utterances by Kirika's father sets off the major conflict in the novella that pits characters against each other; in this case, parents against their elder son.

Kirika's sensitive nature is excusable as a result of his age. He is only fifteen years old and in the threshold of adolescence. As an adolescent who is overly sensitive, Kirika is easily affected by the actions and the utterances of the other characters. Kirika's sensitive nature is aptly captured by Shaughnessy F. Michael *et al* in, "International Journal of Adolescent and Youth: Working with the Emotionally Sensitive Adolescents," who observes that emotionally sensitive adolescents have:

... a tendency to withdraw, particularly after they have been chastised or criticized by adult figures. Some are simply characterized as "shy" and inhibited. Many of these adolescents tend to repress their feelings and do not verbalize what is in their minds. On the other hand, many do not have the verbal skills to verbalize their feelings and emotional concerns. (48)

The above observation is a fact that manifests itself in the life of James Kirika as is seen in the unfolding story. The mental anguish unleashed by the protagonist's parents' dialogue throws him off balance. As a result becomes forlorn, withdrawn and retreats into his own shell. This poignant state of affairs is amplified by his sister's request which falls on deaf ears as it:

... had not drawn me from my stupor. Instinctively, I turned to attack her but stopped midway when I remembered the disturbing facts. This girl, ready to burst into infectious laughter was not my sister!... I did not have the will power to argue. I did not even want to talk. I just wanted to sit there and think over the predicament I had suddenly found myself in. (6)

Kirika's withdrawal as described above is triggered by the identity crisis which is a contemporary issue that affect many youths in Kenya. This kind of withdrawal is common among many young people suffering emotional crisis due to their sensitive nature.

His suspicious nature heightened by identity crisis completely isolates Kirika from the rest of the family members. This makes his journey to grandmother's place unbearable. Due to this pathos, Kirika's journey:

...to Grandmother's seemed the longest journey I had ever made. It seemed to take hours and no matter how much I tried to sleep, I could not. Could it be true?... I had heard my parents' conversation correctly and I was certain they had been talking about me. (7)

It is this kind of predicament that erects a psychological wall between the protagonist and the rest of his family, irrespective of whether they have wronged him or not. It is from this

perception that he closely analyses members of his family starting with their physical appearance to their character. For instance he observes that he is fairer complexioned compared to his father although he acknowledges the fact that he cannot wholly put his father's skin colour into distinct perspective owing to his bearded face. As for Vic he, "...was the darkest in the family" (7). The above comparison of himself with other members of his family is a reflection of a soul completely enmeshed in eddy waters of emotional turbulence as a result of the identity crisis he suffers.

Kabui's choice of characters confines the action of the novella within the boundaries of a nuclear family although it finally spreads its tentacles to include some members of the extended family such as the grandmother, Aunt Shiku, Uncle Ken as well as Bernard and his son Zach who are servants at grandmother's place. The character traits of these characters are revealed to us through Kirika's perspective. As minor characters, all their actions and whims are seen as rotating around the character of Kirika, the protagonist, as they help in reinforcing the action in the novella.

Peterson Ngece (Kirika's Father)

Kirika's father is an accountant working for a private company in the town the family lives. We only know him as Kirika's father since his real name has not been given. Kirika is not particularly fond of his father who he describes as strict and indifferent. To cope with him he ascribes his character to the nature of his work as an accountant of a private company. He describes his demeanour and especially his face as befitting, "... his work as an accountant for the private company that kept him at work every day except Sunday. Much of our interaction on weekdays was related to school work" (8). Could Kirika's take on his father have been influenced by his sudden discovery that he is not his biological father? This is not



likely since Kirika seems to have observed his father's behaviour for a long time. Owing to the sensitive nature of the youth, nothing seems to escape their notice.

The character of Kirika's father is punctuated by indifference, aloofness and lack of time for the family, factors that can be considered as some of the contemporary issues that afflict many families and especially the youth in Kenya. The above problem is tenaciously recurrent in many middle class families in Kenya as epitomized by Kirika's family. In many such families, parents have no time for their family leaving the responsibility of raising their children to teachers, house helps or even grandparents which may end up exacerbating identity crisis among children and the youth an issue that might lead to delinquency. This predicament is poignantly manifested by the father's behaviour towards Kirika. His behaviour as he inquires about Kirika's school grades-- which is their only point of convergence-- is seen as strict and devoid of filial warmth. His take on school work is that, "A zero can make a world of difference in mathematics and in life" (8). This is true. However we cannot forgive Kirika's father for his cruel reprimand against the protagonist. When he comments about geography, he wonders how Kirika gets, "... a D in geography? Geography is about what you see in the environment every day. How do you find your way home if you score so poorly in map reading?" (8). As much as we cannot forgive Kirika's father's cold approach to issues, we are forced to share in his pain as he stares helplessly at the plummeting grades of his son. This happens when Kirika brings home a C-(minus) which is a reflection of Kirika's desperation and lack of ambition.

In his role, Kirika's father acts as the catalyst that sparks the major conflict in the text; the identity crisis the protagonist suffers. This is caused by his utterances for instance; the

conversation he had with his wife, negative attitude and the indifference with which he treats Kirika.

Wario (Kirika's Mother)

The character of Kirika's mother is completely different from that of his father. She is portrayed as a voice of reason and a fortress upon which the entire family is anchored. When Kirika's father complains about the ingratitude of the boy he had been supporting for fifteen years, his wife tries to reason with him in an endeavour to cool his temper. She tells him, "Though you are not his biological father, he does call you father. You cannot disown him after all these years" (3). The above words portray Kirika's mother as a reasonable woman who acts as a conduit through which flaring tempers in the family find escape. Furthermore, she cautions her husband against doing, "... anything in a rush... Bear in mind that whatever you do will affect all of us" (3). The above utterance portrays her as a moral beacon and a glue that binds the family together. Her utterances put her apart as more reasonable compared to her husband.

More so, Kirika's mother is portrayed as responsible and caring. When the family goes to visit the grandmother in the countryside, Kirika's mother makes sure that she has purchased all family requirements including foodstuffs and medical stuff such as painkillers and "something for indigestion, some cough syrup and throat lozenges. When she took a bottle of surgical spirit and a roll of bandage, I had to laugh" (11). This paints the picture of a woman who is so caring to a point of being comical. This is portrayed where the protagonist is seen wondering whether they are going to a war.

Kirika's mother is also portrayed as a level-headed matriarch who is not perturbed by her son's disturbing questions on the delicate issue of identity. This is an audacious move where Kirika asks her mother "Are you my mother?" (11). This question almost puts his mother off-balance but she seems to recover in time to answer it with a measure of level headedness although we cannot fail to notice her anxiety behind the facade of serenity. As is characteristic of adults however, her answer is circuitous as seen where Kirika's mother answers a question with another. She is seen wondering, "What sort of question is that? Of course I am your mother. Has another woman presented herself as your mother?" (11). His mother's answer plays a pivotal role in showing the social-psychological divide between a child's perspective and the perspective of adults towards life whereby children might fail to comprehend complex issues in life unlike adults who may possess subtle abstraction abilities.

Finally however, his audacity brings the protagonist to the conclusion that at least he is not an adopted child as is seen where his mother tells him that, "... you are not adopted. You are my son, born on March third at 7:00 a.m at Ngirigasha hospital" (12). The above answer is very important as it puts to rest the issue of maternal heritage. At least he is sure of his biological mother. His greatest task now is for him to dig deeper for his paternal roots.

### Uncle Ken

He is brother to Kirika's mother. Uncle Ken is depicted as industrious as seen in his rearing of pigs for:

A Chinese company (that) had set up a pork factory at Sheeba and was encouraging farmers to buy piglets from them, rear them to maturity and sell them to the factory. Uncle Ken expected to make a tidy sum of money out of his investment in the pigs. (17)

Uncle Ken's dedication is very important in teaching the youth the virtues of industry and hard work which is alien among a sizeable number of contemporary youth in Kenya especially those deeply enmeshed in delinquency and hopelessly gaping identity crisis. More so, Uncle Ken's project introduces us to the contemporary issue of expatriate proliferation in Kenya especially those from eastern hemisphere who: in spite of being Kenya's development partners have dominated most of economical arteries such as government contracts leading to disenfranchisement among Kenyans of all walks of life especially the educated youths desperate for a better livelihood, an issue at the core of their identity.

#### Aunt Shiku

She is uncle Ken's wife. Aunt Shiku is portrayed as exhibiting the endearing qualities of nurture and an unassuming sense of care. Disturbed by Kirika's aloofness and feigned sickness, she is thus seen inquiring about his well-being (24). In the same vein, she is seen consoling the protagonist by telling him "Maybe it's change of weather... Take a rest and you will be well soon" (24). This caring attitude portrays aunt Shiku as a conscientious woman who cares for her family members and by extension the extended family. This is the kind of support required among families to prop the youth during this most critical time of emotional turbulence characterized by the escalation of adolescence woes hence identity crisis.

#### Kirika' Grandmother

Of all the characters, Kirika's grandmother is seen as the most loving towards the protagonist. Her towering kindness is the cohesive force that tenaciously binds members of her extended family. Her special fondness for Kirika is however understandable since it owes its existence to the filial bond that binds them. For one, it is worth noting that Kirika is the grandmother's husband's namesake, having been named after him (James Kirika). To his grandmother the

young boy is the reincarnation of her husband. That is why the grandmother in her hallucinations-since she was suffering from " ... a mild form of Alzheimer's disease..." (64), is seen confusing the young man with her late husband whom she deludes to have come back to life. When the protagonist introduces himself by uttering his name "It's me Kirika" (44), the grandmother is struck by the protagonist's name and is consequently seen hallucinating, " Oh, you have come back?... How are they?...Richu and Njambi. Are they well?" (44). This apostrophic dialogue on the part of the grandmother betrays her mental fragility due to advancement in age and Alzheimer's scourge. Due to her advanced age and fragility, the grandmother is on the verge of crossing the river of mortality to the world yonder. This is a normal phenomenon, although our human sympathy and admiration is not lost for a woman seen as harbouring undying love for her late husband and children Richu and Njambi who died at infancy. Her irrevocable love is almost interred with the immortality of human soul as corroborated by her last years' habits of sleeping by her husband's graveside and the deluded utterance of his name in her loud dreams and sleepwalking.

All in all, her irrevocable love for her husband and by extension that of her family is seen in her acts of selflessness. Her generosity is aptly described by the protagonist thus, the grandmother, "in spite of her aging, had decided that her sole purpose in life was to 'spoil' her grandchildren" (1). The above description is an emotive rendition couched in sublimity befitting the selflessness of grandmother's stature. This towering stature is capped by her generous act of bequeathing a cow to the protagonist (who is the symbol of her husband's reincarnation).

### Old-Man Bernard

He is a servant employed by Kirika's grandmother. He is an old man who has been working for the grandmother for the whole of his life. Kirika's family exhibits a streak characterized by traits of care, love and cohesiveness that contrast sharply with that of the servants in the family- the old man Bernard and his son Zach. The first time we meet with Bernard we are forced to judge him as cantankerous, conservative and disdainful towards the city dwellers such as Kirika, the protagonist. His abhorrence of city folks is so intense that he is even seen questioning God for His misguided action of sending rain to the city, a place where no one farms. Remarking on the uncalled for extravagance by the Supreme Deity, Bernard remarks bitterly, "God sure is strange. Why does he send rain to the city and no food is grown there? If it were left to me...!" (15). The narrator does not give him time to finish his sentence due to sheer amount of bile that underlies his utterance that borders on the realms of blasphemy.

When Kirika inquires about his gift of a cow by the grandmother, the old man's disdain is evident from his nasty retort, "Not the heifer silly... Of course the calf... who in their right senses would give you a heifer with a calf? Unless you were marrying off your daughter..." (15). His flinty hatred towards the town's folks is almost understandable for he considers them lazy and unworthy of respect since they know nothing about farming- the only activity that Bernard appreciates due to his rural background. His lack of education and proletarian social economic status almost redeems the perspective of our moral judgment towards his villainy.

### Zach

He is Bernard's son. He was born and brought in the grandmother farm where his father is a servant. Compared to his father, Zach is not any better. He is portrayed as a sulky young man

completely submerged in a quagmire of identity crisis. The first time we meet with him, Zach is caged in a bush smoking bhang. When startled out of his rendezvous by Kirika, he guiltily replies that he, "bought it... picking the now smoldering leaf... It is just that this leaf is overgrown ..." (29). Drug abuse as reflected in Zach's conversation with the protagonist is one of the contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya. It is a poignant sign of confusion and lack of identity that affects the youth hence the novella's important role in highlighting the effects of drug menace and a possibility of their eradication.

Nyakeeru (Wendo)

He is the general manager at Sheeba tea factory. His real name is Mr.Wendo. The local people however refer to him as Nyakeeru which is a nick-name that means white-complexioned person. Although he is not a white man, Mr.Wendo is extremely light-complexioned hence the nick-name. He is the major antagonist in *Ask the Stars*. His past and present actions are the major source of conflict and the identity crisis that the protagonist suffers.

Hypothetically he is Kirika's biological father as the protagonist assumes when this is revealed through grandmother's monologue in her loud dreams. In her dream, the grandmother says "That Nyakeeru who refused to take responsibility, he would be ashamed of himself if he saw the boy" (50). Apparently, grandmother's monologue depicts Nyakeeru as an irresponsible person who abandons Wario(Kirika's mother) by reneging on his promise to marry her in spite of the fact that they had a son. This clue heightens tension in Kirika's person for it almost confirms his suspicion that he is not the biological son of his current father as suggested in the conversation he unexpectedly eavesdrops.

More so, Nyakeeru is depicted as imperious and cold-hearted. This is manifested during Kirika's encounter with him. In his relentless search of paternal identity, the protagonist goes to the tea factory with an aim of meeting Nyakeeru. To achieve this goal, he obstructs Nyakeeru's car which brakes at his feet almost running him down. The recklessness with which Nyakeeru drives is a manifestation of his imperiousness. When he alights from the car, his cold-heartedness manifests itself from the way he rudely addresses Kirika. So furious is he that he throws his words at Kirika "What is the matter, boy?.. Get off the road... Hakuna Kazi(Translation: No job)" (70). After this nasty encounter, Nyakeeru jumps into his car and "swerved past... and drove off, a cloud of dust following him" (70). Nyakeeru's flinty and condescending utterances are a reflection of his brash character and callousness. His actions and utterances are a source of great pain to Kirika and heightened tension in the text.

Nyakeeru's villainy is lastly exposed when the local youths petrol-bombs his home at the factory. Kirika describes this incident thus:

It turned out that it was some of Zach's friends who had thrown the petro-bomb into Mr.Wendo's compound. They had complained that the Factory Manager discriminated against them in employment. They claimed that he overlooked people from Sheeba and employed people from other places" (137).

Nyakeeru's discrimination against the youths of Sheeba community is by extension a reflection of nepotism, cronyism and tribalism that has permeated the Kenyan society today. Nyakeeru's actions like in the case of any other figure of authority in the society has a far reaching consequences to the youth; for they interfere with their ambitions, aspirations and upward mobility leading to disenfranchisement and despondency. This is the kind of hopelessness that might lead to delinquent behaviour among the youth as portrayed in the



action of the youths who bombs Nyakeeru's home. The same is also portrayed in Kirika's behaviour where he vows to revenge against Nyakeeru by harming his daughter Stacy Wendo; before he eventually changes his mind.

#### Stacy Wendo

She is the daughter of Nyakeeru and a form one student at St. Christine's Secondary School (78-81). She is an antagonist through association due to her identity as Nyakeeru's (the major antagonist) daughter. Kirika creates a scapegoat in Stacy as a conduit through which he vents his hatred against Nyakeeru.

Stacy is depicted as strict and businesslike. When Kirika introduces himself to her, she just continues walking without pausing. When Kirika asks her "What the hurry?" (80), she curtly answers "Nothing" (80). When he tells her his name, she briskly answers "I know... I was in the church" (80) then she continued walking after giving Kirika a look that he thought was a suggestion of "I am not silly" (80) Stacy's behaviour is not entirely revolting for it portrays her as an informed youth especially in dealing with boy-girl relationship. On the other hand it reflects the kind of behaviour most other people portray when dealing with strangers. Stacy's behaviour is recommendable when dealing with strange men to avoid predation or falling into their heinous intentions.

When looked from another perspective that is devoid of Kirika's biased opinion, we realize that Stacy is sociable and well comported. The narrator describes how Stacy was enjoying the activities the pastor had introduced for youth in the church and therefore was not "in a hurry to leave. She stayed on and seemed to enjoy all the activities. I too perhaps would have enjoyed the afternoon had I not been obsessed with accomplishing my plan" (85). Obviously, Stacy like many other youths in the church is enjoying herself since she is oblivious of

Kirika's heinous intentions against her. Her sociable character is further depicted in the way she gives other girls a lift in her family car. After requesting for permission from the family's driver she "beckoned to those who wanted a ride to join her. Three girls joined her and the car drove off" (86-87). The action above portrays Stacy as sociable and generous. We also notice her grace and humility in the way she courteously requests for permission from the family's driver before giving a lift to other youngsters. It is also portrayed in the way she beckons at other youths without discrimination (87).

From Stacy's actions and utterances it is clear that she is a disciplined and a well behaved youth. She is only a victim of Kirika's vengefulness. She is only a scapegoat in Kirika's revenge mission. As a result we cannot blame her for the identity crisis that Kirika suffers.

At last Kirika's relationship with Stacy undergoes complete change where he abandons his revenge mission against her. Kirika's change of attitude towards Stacy is motivated by the latter's sincerity and strength of character as reflected in her selflessness when she gives a lift to other youths in her family's car. Their new found relationship is reflected in Kirika thought motif where he questions his mission "would I see her again?...What did she think of me?...Would I still carry out my plan?" (88). From the above questions it is evident that Kirika's admiration for Stacy has completely changed their relation for the better. They are no longer foes for now it has dawned on him that Stacy is not the cause of the identity crisis he suffers.

Valerie (Val)

She is Kirika's classmate. As a child of a single mother, the only other person she knows is her grandmother as revealed in the text. Her father is not known as it is later revealed.

Val comes out as a snob and utterly spoilt. Her snobbish behaviour comes out from the way she insists on being called Val instead of Valerie (92), for she thinks this to be more trendy and fashionable and a depiction of her “higher” socio-economic class; for she pretends to be from a rich family.

Her arrogance is further portrayed in the way she lies about her parents’ occupation. Kirika narrates that Val:

had made it known to everyone at school that her parents were wealthy—her father was a researcher in America and her mother was a stewardess with a reputable airline. She always talked loudly of exotic places she had been to over the school holidays and of gifts her mother bought her from faraway lands. To be honest, I did not think she had time for those of us who only visited our grandparents or were obviously not from wealthy backgrounds. (92-93)

The above description portrays Val’s snobbishness that orchestrates a lot of tension among her classmates for the way she openly brags about her supposedly superior pedigree.

Ironically this facade is shattered when her mother is arrested and charged with drug trafficking. This is reported via the TV news cast that “a woman had been arrested at the airport with a consignment of drugs. The woman would be taken to the law courts the following week” (95). The above episode is a turning point in Val’s life. It marks the end of her bragging and chastisement. It also reveals the identity crisis that she suffers; for she now fears being labeled a criminal due to her association with the mother. That is the reason she says “Everyone now knows that my mother is a criminal. People probably think I am a criminal too!” (97).She continues to tell Kirika “Wait until the day your father commits a

crime, you will know what embarrassment is!” (98). The last utterance is akin to placing a hot iron on a fresh wound. It shakes Kirika to the core for he is already suffering identity crisis.

The identity crisis that Val suffers compares favourably to that of Kirika. Like Kirika, Val is not sure of her paternal identity. This is revealed through Val’s conversation with Kirika when she tells the latter:

My father is not in America... I do not have a father... I once asked my mother who my father is and she said I should never think of him. I think I assumed he must have been a terrible man and I hated him without even knowing him. In his place I created a loving father who longed to be with his only child but the pressure of important work could not allow him. (105)

The above confession by Val has put her in the same shoes with Kirika. The two compares on an equal footing since both are not sure of their paternal heritage hence the identity crisis they suffer. Their only point of divergence lies in the fact that Kirika has a father figure in his life, although he is not sure whether Father (Peterson Ngece) is his biological parent whereas Val does not know her father at all. More so, Kirika resolves his identity crisis when he realizes that his father has been taking care of a young man by the name Ngece for “for fifteen years” (137), after the death of the latter’s father. He therefore realizes that he could have been mistaken. This is unlike Val’s identity crisis which remains unresolved by the time the narrative comes to an end.

## **2.5 Stylistic Devices used in the Story**

The story in a novel is the way events are narrated according to their time-sequence. The Creation of a story involves the narration of the way episodes unfold following each other in the novel. The story is the most important aspect of the novel without which it cannot exist. The above ideas echoes, Forster's take on the story where he says, "... the novel tells a story... That is the fundamental aspect without which it could not exist. That is the highest factor common to all novels..." (17). According to Forster, the story is the most important aspect of the novel. Its indispensability to the novelistic discourse hinges on the fact that a novel cannot exist without a story.

To tell a story, a novelist has to apply a set of creative tools referred to as the style. Story is a creative process that involves the application of various stylistic devices such as irony, dialogue, description, paradox, rhetorical questions, imagery and a host of other aesthetic elements that constitutes the style. In *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, I have analyzed three elements of style which include: description, dialogue, rhetorical questions and imagery which are the most prominent devices Kabui has used to tell her story. I have also demonstrated how the above stylistic aspects have been used to explore the issue of identity crisis among the youth in Kenya.

### **2.5.1 Dialogue**

In *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, Kabui has extensively used dialogue as a stylistic tool to tell her story. Dialogue is a way of interaction which involves characters conversing with each other in a work of art. These words corroborate Henry Indangasi's definition of dialogue in his book, *Stylistics* as:

a strategy where characters talk in fiction and the author makes conversation resemble real communication in life... you will encounter features such as false starts, hesitation, held syllables, all manner of intonation and of course oddities such as hyperbole." (117)

Since dialogue involves conversation between characters in a work of art, it helps in the revelation of their character traits, their attitude towards each other and their internal tensions and conflicts and ultimately the way these issues contribute to the thematic concerns tackled in the texts. As characters converse with each other they advance the action in the narrative hence the importance of dialogue in plot development in a literary work such as the novellas tackled in this project. It is through the above parameters that dialogue has aided in the revelation of how Kabui tackles the theme of identity crisis which is one of the contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya.

The major theme, that is, identity crisis among the youth in *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* is introduced through dialogue. Kirika is thrown into the turmoil of identity crisis when he unexpectedly eavesdrops on his parents' conversation. It is this theme that also ushers in the major conflict in the novella. In the dialogue, Kirika's father's disgust is palpable where he is seen complaining about a boy he has been taking care of for fifteen years without any positive results since the boy, "just keeps disappointing me...." (2). In this dialogue however, Kirika's mother is portrayed as a moral fulcrum and a voice of reason for she is seen urging her husband to abandon his line of thinking. In this respect she is seen telling her husband, even though:

you are not his biological father, he does call you Father. You cannot disown him after all these years.... Do not do anything in a rush... Bear in mind that whatever you do will affect all of us...".(3)

The above dialogue depicts the boy in question as failing in his expected roles hence a source of disappointment to his parents especially his father. It is this stage of youth hood and adolescence that the psychoanalyst, Eric Erikson refers to as "Identity versus role confusion". Here Erikson is of the view that young people who fail in their expected social roles such as achievement in education, end up becoming confused in life. It is this confusion that propels them to engage in delinquent behaviour such as drug abuse, as in the case of Zach and his friends as highlighted by Kabui. This is a contemporary issue that affect many youths in Kenya hence the need for a cautious approach.

The first clue to the protagonist's identity comes through the dialogue he has with Bernard. In their conversation, Bernard notifies him of the change in name of the local market from Ngirigasha to Sheeba market. To the conservative Bernard however, it still remained Ngirigasha for he has not yet accepted the change (22). To Kirika this is a very important clue since his mother had categorically told him that he was not an adopted child but had been born at Ngirigasha hospital (12).

From grandmother's dreamy monologue, Kirika gets a clue that Nyakeeru-the manager at the tea factory-could be his biological father. Consequently, he mounts a relentless search for Nyakeeru which takes him to the tea factory. When they meet for the first time, however, the conversation that ensues between the two is completely off-putting. Nyakeeru rudely shouts at Kirika "What is the matter, boy? ... You want to die? ... Get off the road ... Hakuna kazi?..." (70) Due to Nyakeeru's rudeness, Kirika is so "dumbfounded" that he can only

stammer “I...I...” (70). Nyakeeru rudeness is a cause of excruciating pain to Kirika. In his tireless search of paternal identity he no longer yearns for a relationship with Nyakeeru; instead, he now seeks revenge.

Now that he is no longer interested in establishing a filial relationship with Nyakeeru, Kirika shifts his energy to a revenge mission against the former he now regards as his worst foe. Due to their age difference and Nyakeeru socio-economic power, Kirika is unable to directly take revenge on him. Instead he creates a scapegoat in Stacy, Nyakeeru’s daughter. Consequently, he tries to acquaint himself with Stacy as seen in the conversation he initiates when he meets her at the church. As a starting point he calls her loudly “Hey Stacy wait up!” When he catches up with her Kirika proceeds to ask “What the hurry?” (80), to which she answers “Nothing” (80). When Kirika introduces himself “I am Jimmy,” Stacy is prompt with an answer “I know... I was in the church” (80) The tension between them is evident as seen in the above conversation. This is expected since Stacy and Kirika are strangers to each other. Their encounter is riddled with suspicion on the part of Stacy. Kirika on the other hand is just probing with an intention of testing her points of strength and/or weakness as an entry point into her life, in his quest for revenge against Nyakeeru (Stacy’s father).

In the course of their conversation, we realize that Kirika is slowly backtracking on his revenge mission. This happens after further interaction with Stacy who strikes him as utterly sincere. Stacy’s earnestness is revealed through her answers which are straight and to the point. They contrast with Kirika’s answers which are circuitous and dishonest as they are punctuated with lies. When Stacy asks Kirika “where do you live?” (81), Kirika’s dishonesty is evident for he “told her as vaguely...without mentioning any names” for he thinks “I did not want to reveal much about myself for I figured that once I had punished her for her father’s



deeds, we would not be friends” (81). When she asks him “Where do you go to school?” (81), he again lies to her. But on posing the same question to him Stacy is honest and straight to the point “St. Christine’s” (81). Their conversation portrays two different characters; that of Stacy who is portrayed as sincere and that of Kirika who comes out as dishonest. This is a clear portrayal of their differing intentions; since Kirika acquaints himself with Stacy with an intention of harming her whereas the later thinks that their conversation is just a normal social interaction. In the process Kirika relaxes as result of which he is drawn to Stacy. Slowly he seems to be abandoning his revenge mission, since after their parting he is left longing for her company.

Through dialogue, the issue of drug menace and its centrality in identity formation is brought to the fore. Through the conversation between Valerie, also popularly known as Val and Kirika, we get the shocking revelation that the former's mother is a transnational drug peddler. It is all over the news after Val's mother is arrested. As a result, Kirika tries to comfort her by telling her, "maybe it's a mistake" (96). This is just a consolation for Val who is not shocked by her mother's incarceration for she already, "knew...." as she convincingly claims that, " I saw a bundle of stuff in the handbag once and suspected it must be drugs because she sold it to an eccentric looking man when we went out that evening” (96). Val also claims to have eavesdropped on her mother's telephone conversation with her drug cartel which was rather incriminating. Val’s mother thinks that the girl is too young to understand the content of their conversation which is an indication the gulf in understanding between the parents and their children. Many parents think of their children as too innocent and naive to understand complicated issues such as Val's parent's trade on narcotics which is far from the truth. The reality is that most children cannot be fooled on most of the issues since by the time they reach teenage years they have to a large extent acquired enough Knowledge and

experience that enable them understand the world around them. This is a developmental stage characterized by elastic identity where teenagers are neither children nor adults.

Val's rejection by Kirika's parents- for she had wanted to spend a day at Kirika's, serves to highlight how children's identity is tied to that of their parent's. This is why Kirika's mother in her conversation with the protagonist remarks, "She was right, people will judge her a criminal because of her mother's actions" (101). Due to such mentality, Kirika's parents cannot accommodate Val even for a single day in spite of Kirika's insistence. His request is flatly rejected by his parents.

Val's conversation with Kirika also serves to show that the former is the child of a single parent with no known biological father. This is contrary to her earlier claiming that, "her father was a researcher and her mother was a stewardess with a reputable airline"(92). In a funny twist of fate, here is the vain Val taking a complete about turn to boldly state that she did not know her biological father. Her vanity is completely obliterated at last. Through the conversation we also realize that she is an only child with only a mother and a grandmother for relatives. Dialogue in literature is important since it helps in revealing a character's traits, their feelings, intentions, frustrations, aspirations and a host of other emotions and behavioural aspects. The above aspects are revealed as characters participate in the interactive process in a work of literature.

### 2.5.2 Description

Description involves the way an artist manipulates words to create a setting, a character(s), or an event in a work of art so that it is vividly registered in the imagination of a reader or audience. Description is an important device in prose as it enhances the readers' imagination by directly appealing to their human senses. The a

bove assertion concurs with Vincent O. Odour's take on description that:

When an author describes something or somebody, the author appeals to the senses of the reader. Such description should make the reader see, feel, taste, hear, or even smell the thing or person. If the author achieves this then the style is described as vivid, graphic or cinematic description. (22)

From the above argument, it is clear that description appeals to the readers' senses hence their imagination and ability to visualize a work of art in the process of deciphering meaning.

In Kabui's, *Was Nyakeeru my father?*, description has extensively been used to explore the thematic concerns. Kirika's search for identity is brought to us through vivid description. He is seen scrutinizing the physical appearance of his family members to ascertain the similarity and differences in their appearance as a clue to his agonizing search for his own identity. Consequently, Kirika is seen describing his father:

I looked at Father as he drove. Did we resemble each other? I was of much fairer complexion than he was and it was difficult to tell father's features distinctly through the slightly bearded face. He was tall but at fifteen I was almost as tall as he was, so it seemed I was bound to get taller than him when I was fully grown up. Was it possible to tell whether people were related by just looking at them? I wondered. I

however quickly concluded that looks could not tell much when I thought of Vic and Penny seated next to me. (7)

The above description points to a grim picture of a protagonist who is desperately trying to clutch at any clue that would lead to the unraveling of his identity. He however realizes that mere looks, although an important parameter, cannot be conclusively used to unmask one's identity.

As the setting shifts from the city to the rural area, grandmother's place as an integral component of the plot is immortalized in our imagination through vivid description. Kirika describes the place:

The gate to grandmother's compound was not conventional by town's standards. It was two thin logs placed across a stand on either side. The logs were only pulled off when cattle and other livestock and, as in this case, a car, had to pass through the gate. As for people, they just climbed over the logs or used a narrow passage barred with barbed wire. Penny climbed over the gate and Vic and I pulled down the logs. (12-13)

This description is important to show how setting in the text changes from urban to rural areas. It is also a portrayal of many Kenyan people's dual heritage, where they exhibit both urban and rural identities. Many Kenyan urbanites as well possess rural homes where they retreat during important occasions such as the Christmas, August as well as Easter vacations. Kirika's search for identity is consequently seen moving from the city to the rural area where he gets important clues from various characters such as the grandmother.

The issue of drug abuse and its centrality in identity formation among the youth is brought to us through description. Zach is a hopeless young man who is seen as suffering identity crisis. Due to desperation and lack of clear goals in life, he turns to drugs for consolation. When caught by Kirika smoking bhang, he panics and tries to hide it unsuccessfully. Kirika describes the situation thus:

Zach tried to get the leaf out of view but the thick smoke betrayed its presence. "Nothing," he lied. "You are lying!" I said accusingly and skirted around him to get a better look. He turned, making sure I could not get a hold of the leaf in his hand. ... Soon it became like the game of shake- the game we used to play in school where one person tried to get past another without getting tapped. The 'game' however only lasted for a few seconds for soon Zach yelled and dropped the leaf, now flaming with the fire, on the ground. I jumped into action and with one foot stamped out the fire. (28)

Zach's actions are a pointer to the sense of guilt associated with drug abuse and its effects in identity formation among the youth. Young people who are confused about their role in life will many a times turn to drugs leading to their destruction.

Kirika's quest for revenge against Wendo (Nyakeeru) whom he takes to be his biological father extends to the church where he is hoping to revenge against Stacy Wendo as a way of getting back at her father. To achieve his sinister motive he has to keep himself close to Stacy as described:

Soon pastor called us together and told us to form two groups to play tug of war with one of the long ropes he had brought. Each of the two groups had to have both

brothers and sisters, as pastor called us. I waited to see which group Stacy would join and I went over to her. .... I positioned myself behind her as the tug began. .... After about five minutes of tagging, pastor instructed us to change sides. Again I made sure I was behind Stacy. Indeed, I made sure I was in Stacy's team in whatever game we played. (84-85)

The above description marks Kirika as a vengeful person who can go to great extents of even defiling holy places such as the church in his malevolent quest for revenge.

### **2.5.3 Rhetorical Questions**

Every work of literature is distinct in style and aesthetics. Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* is distinct in its widespread use of rhetorical questions. Perhaps this is due to the nature of the text since most of the action takes place in the mind of Kirika, the protagonist. Kirika is a young man of fifteen years who is facing harrowing mental trauma as a result of an identity crisis he faces. Therefore, the ubiquitous use of rhetorical questions is a reflection of internal conflict bottled up in the persona's psyche.

Rhetorical questions are thought provoking questions which do not necessarily require an answer. Some rhetorical questions are preceded by statements that already answer the question whereas others such as the ones that question the powers of deities, fate or some other abstract life's phenomena cannot be answered. Their main function therefore is to provoke the minds of the readers to critically reflect on the subject matter. To understand the use of rhetorical questions and their function in literature, it would be worthy to ponder on Bryanna Licciardi's definition of rhetorical questions in his article, "Rhetorical questions in Literature: Definition, Effects and Examples," as:

... a device used to persuade or subtly influence the audience. It's a question asked not for the answer, but for the effect. Oftentimes, a rhetorical question is used to emphasize a point or just to get the audience thinking. Sometimes a rhetorical question is asked with the asker already knowing the answer... Other times, the questions asked are unanswerable.( [study.com/..rhetorical-question-in...](http://study.com/..rhetorical-question-in...))

From the above definition, it is clear that some rhetorical questions are mental stimulants since a majority cannot be answered. Many a times, they are a reflection of the character's thought motif that invites the readers to share in their consciousness, conflicts and the dilemmas that assault them.

In Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, Kirika, the protagonist is seen posing several rhetorical questions that reflect his internal conflict as a result of the identity crisis he faces. For instance, Kirika's grim encounter with identity crisis is ushered into the text by a set of rhetorical questions. As the story unfolds, we meet him wondering, "Whom had Father taken care of for fifteen years?... Who had been a great disappointment to him?" (2). These are the kind of rhetorical questions he cannot outrightly answer. They emanate from the parents' conversation he accidentally overhears. The conversation unfortunately coincides with the fact that he has turned fifteen years. This coincidence is like a bombshell to Kirika for it completely obliterates his sense of being by ushering him into a complicated web of identity crisis.

The issue of identity is inextricably intertwined with Kirika's vision and goals in life. His objective in life is to succeed in education and later pursue a lucrative career. The identity crisis he suffers however seems to have tumbled this dream as reflected by a multitude of

rhetorical questions that pervades Kirika's tortured mind. Consequently, Kirika is seen lamenting, "As it seemed now, I was not even sure that I would get to Form Three. What did Father plan to do with me? Would he withdraw me from school and send me away? What would I do?" (9). These rhetorical questions are a reflection of dilemma that assaults his mind. This kind of dilemma further echoes his helpless situation in life. Like other desperate young men in Kenya with similar identity crisis, Kirika is a mere boy who has not yet attained independence. His dream in life would automatically wither if he were to be cast out by the man he has hitherto known as his father.

Kirika's identity crisis has heightened his sensitivity to palpable levels. It is this kind of sensitivity that leads him to allege parental discrimination as ascertained by the multitudinous rhetorical questions he poses. When his father warns him not to get into mischief, Kirika is seen asking, "Had I been up to mischief unknowingly? Why hadn't he told them, especially Vic not to get into mischief? Why had he told only me?" (34). These rhetorical questions are a distressing allegation of parental discrimination. Kirika thinks that Vic and Penny are the biological children of the man he has hitherto called father whereas he himself is not.

When Kirika recovers from the stupor provoked by Nyakeeru's cruelty, he is left pondering over their grim encounter. From the rhetorical questions that punctuate his thought motif we realize Kirika's ambivalence in his take on Nyakeeru. He asks "Was that Nyakeeru? Why hadn't he listened to me? Why had he just assumed that I was looking for a casual job? Why had he appeared so angry with me? Had he known who I was? Unfortunately, I did not have any answers to my numerous questions" (70). From the above questions it is obvious that Kirika cannot tell whether Nyakeeru understands the former's paternal identity for it is obvious that Kirika takes himself to be Nyakeeru's son.



Kirika's disgust for Nyakeeru's irresponsibility is provoked by the pastor's sermon on sin. When Kirika attends the church, he hears the pastor preaching "We are all sinners...Only God is without sin" (127). Consequently we now see Kirika questioning "Do sinners go to church?...Could Mr.Wendo disown his own child and then sit comfortably in church?" (127).This happens when Kirika attends the church only to realize that Stacy was present. She is in the company of "matronly lady I assumed to be her mother and two other children I assumed must be her siblings" (127). Kirika is not amused by Nyakeeru's absence for he already puts him in the category of men who abandons the responsibility for their children like in the protagonist's case hence the identity crisis he suffers.

After the death of his grandmother, Kirika suffers guilty for having listened to her dreamy monologue. The self-hatred that is caused by his actions is evident from the rhetorical questions that he utters. He asks "Why had I not realised earlier that what I had sought to do was wrong?...Why had I been so keen to do what was wrong? Why could I contemplate taking advantage of Grandma? What sort of person had I become? Who was I?...Why had I done such a terrible thing?" (130-131).Kirika's guilty is motivated by the mutual love between himself and the grandmother. He knows that had his grandmother been conscious of her dreamy monologue that betrays her thought motif, she could not have been happy being listened to. On the flipside, it is this monologue that reveals Nyakeeru's identity; that Kirika now takes him to be his biological father.

When Kirika learns that Zach is starting rearing pigs to benefit from Chinese pork industry at Sheeba, he thinks incredulously "Zach and pigs?" (139). This question betrays his negative attitude towards Zach; for he takes the latter to be a bhang-smoking despondent destined for failure in life.

Kirika's preoccupation with revenge against Nyakereru is projected towards Stacy Wendo. If he cannot reach Nyakeeru, then Stacy, his daughter, is as fair game as Nyakeeru could have been. Kirika's quest for revenge is however punctuated with palpable doubt as manifested in the rhetorical question, "I kept wondering as we traveled back home. Would I still carry out my plan?" (88). The dilemma just described is as a result of Kirika's changing feelings towards Stacy. After interacting with Stacy for two days, Kirika starts developing emotional attachment towards her. This is what explains the doubt that assaults his malevolent plans. After harrowing search for identity, Kirika realizes that he cannot possibly change the course of his life. Consequently, we encounter him wondering, "Had I a choice? After finding out who my biological father was, did I have a choice on what to do?" (131). The above rhetorical questions almost render his towering endeavour at identity search meaningless.

In the end, Kirika is not sure whether it is Peterson Ngece or Mr.Wendo (Nyakeeru) who is his biological father. This complication arises when a young man by the name Ngece is introduced to Kirika by Vic. Vic informs Kirika that Ngece's, "... father died fifteen years ago and Father has been helping him" (137). The above statement is paradoxically double-edged for it solves and complicates the identity puzzle at the same time. Consequently, Kirika is seen admitting that he could have been mistaken on the issue of identity. This realization is thus captured, "For the first time it occurred to me that I could have been mistaken. Could my parents have been talking about Ngece?" (138). The above rhetorical question marks the denouement in the plot development. After this incidence, Kirika's relief is palpable. At last he has slain the ghost of identity crisis that hang on his persona like the proverbial sword of Damocles.

The importance of Rhetorical questions in a literary text centres on their ability to provoke and stimulate the readers' thinking. Since most of them are uttered by the narrator in Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, they reflect his state of mind in terms of fears, frustrations, ambitions and aspirations. In simple terms, rhetorical questions are a powerful reflection of the ups and lows of his life. Kirika is in the grip of identity crisis. The rhetorical questions he poses are a reflection of this predicament, his endeavour to solve it and how he finally comes to terms with the reality.

#### **2.5.4 Imagery**

Robert V. Edgar and Jacobs E. Henry's defines imagery in *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing* as:

words that trigger your imagination to recall and recombine images- memories or mental pictures of sights, sounds, tastes, smells, sensations of touch, and motions. The process is active, and even vigorous, for when particular words or descriptions produce images, you are applying your own experiences with life and language to your understanding. (600)

From the above description, we realize that imagery is important for the way it stimulates the readers' imagination in order to visualize the text for better understanding.

In the novella *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, Kabui has extensively used imagery to bring to foreground the theme of identity crisis among the youth. To demonstrate the brotherly love between Kirika and Vic, the protagonist saves his brother from a violent playmate after the former inadvertently damages his bicycle. The owner of the bicycle is derogatorily described

as "whining as if it was he who had been hurt..." (4). Following this incidence Kirika, his brother and the owner of the bicycle proceeds to the repairers shed followed by a big crowd of rowdy boys who were gearing for a sweet spectacle; as they were expecting a fight to break out. In a show of brotherly love however, Kirika pays the four hundred shillings demanded by the repairman to save his brother from the agony.

Kirika wryly describes his thoroughly aged grandmother thus:

It was as if the wrinkles on her face represented her age-and she was an octogenarian. She supported herself using a walking stick and when she approached me I could see that her back was bent, almost making her look like a hunchback. (13)

This unflattering picture of Kirika's grandmother paints her as thoroughly aged and frail. She is also demented and suffering Alzheimer's disease (64). It is a combination of these factors that lead to her hallucinations giving Kirika an important clue to his identity.

Kirika's search for paternal identity is punctuated with excruciating mental anguish as captured by his spectacular observation of the clouds. In his anguish he is misled to think that the clouds are mocking him from the way they are grotesquely patterned in the sky. Using rich imagery, he describes how he:

... stretched out and lay on the ground, staring at the sky and feeling sorry for himself. Light clouds gathered in the sky and no matter how I looked at them, they appeared to me like circus clowns laughing at me. There was one who was even pointing a finger down at me. I shut my eyes to block the mocking clowns and that is how I must have fallen asleep. (26)

The above description is a poignant reflection of Kirika's anguished mind. He is thoroughly tormented by the relentless search for his paternal identity.

Kirika's search for identity takes him to the tea factory where he goes to confront Mr. Wendo (Nyakeeru) whom he thinks to be his father. His meeting with Wendo however leads to a bitter confrontation which leaves him thoroughly shaken. This scenario is vividly described "The saliva in my mouth tasted like bile and I spat on the ground as far as possible" (71). This bitterness is as a result of the realization that Wendo (Nyakeeru) does not wish to be associated with him in spite of the hint that he is Kirika's biological father. He does not want to be associated with a boy he considers poor, lowly and wretched.

Due to mental anguish and bitterness, Kirika compares Mr. Wendo (Nyakeeru) to a monster he does not wish to emulate. He admits that he, "did not know much about Mr. Wendo but after my brief encounter with him, I had created a monster-devil in my mind. I did not want to turn out like him" (97). Kirika equates Mr. Wendo to a monster due to the latter's cruelty and callousness towards him. Wendo is a symbolic representation of all the malevolent leaders in the society. He is not a role model to the youth. Young people would wish to emulate their parents, teachers or other adults of exemplary reputation but not people like Wendo who comes out as cold and agonizingly indifferent towards the youth.

Imagery is an important stylistic device whose centrality in a text owes to its ability to stimulate the readers' imaginative faculties to vividly visualize the subject matter. Their deployment in a text such as Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* is fundamental for they aid in the exposition of the subject matter such as identity crisis that bedevil youth in Kenya.

## 2.6 The Narrative Voice

Narrative voice refers to the point of view through which a story is narrated. It can also refer to the narrator and the perspective through which he tells the story. Roberts V. Edgar and Jacobs E. Henry define the point of view as:

... the voice that authors adopt for their stories. You might also think of point of view as a work's narrator, speaker, or persona—a living personality who tells stories, presents arguments, or expresses attitudes such as love, anger, or excitement" (196).

Following the above definition, it is clear that writers create narrators as mouth piece through which they narrate their stories. In Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* The story is narrated through the viewpoint Gennette refers to as External focalization where:

the viewpoint is *outside* the character depicted, so that we are told only things which are external or observable – that is, what the characters *say* and *do*, these being things you would hear and see for yourself if you were present at the scene depicted (Barry, 152).

We also understand these stories from the narrator's perspective since stories unfold through their narrator's eyes. In Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, the narrator, James Kirika, is also the protagonist in the story. As the narrator who is also involved in the major action in the text, Kirika tells the story using first person narrative voice. Bergman and Epstein defines first person narrative voice as a situation where the narration is done by someone involved in the major action of the story through the use of first person pronouns such, "I did this' or 'I saw that' " (22). It is therefore worthy noting that the whole story in Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru*

my Father unfolds through the lenses of Kirika who is the protagonist and narrator at the same. This way, Kirika is the type of narrator Genette refers to as homodiegetic narrator. This is the kind of a narrator who “is present as a character in the story he tells (Barry, 152). As the narrator Kirika effectively communicates the theme of identity crisis as he is the one who suffers the same. Being a teenager of fifteen years who is grappling with various forces in his developmental trajectory as he blossoms into a youth, the problems Kirika encounters reflects the tribulations that bedevil many Youths in contemporary Kenyan society.

In Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* Kirika is the protagonist and the narrator at the same time. The identity crisis he faces is as a result of his sensitivity. Kirika, like any other youth in the throes of adolescence is overly sensitive. After eavesdropping on his parents he projects the conversation to his life. His father is complaining about a boy he has been caring for fifteen years who turns out to be a failure and a great disappointment. Kirika's projection is almost justified for he "had turned fifteen just a few months earlier" (2). What a terrible coincidence? It is for this reason that Kirika is seen wondering whether his father could have been referring to him. This is pure sensitivity that plunges him into a quagmire of identity crisis. Kirika's closeness to his young brother Vic is severely tested by the identity crisis he suffers. This closeness is evidenced by his tendency to play the big brother when he is with Vic. It is in pursuance of this role that Kirika saves Vic when the later inadvertently damages a playmate's bicycle. When the protagonist pays for the damages, Vic's, "... relief was visible" (5), especially when he fished a five hundred shilling's note from his pocket. This action is a proof of the hero worship that characterizes young people's life. Kirika like many young people is hungry for admiration and appreciation. He is very happy that his young brother, Vic admires him and almost worships him as a role model. This is what informs his magnanimous gesture towards his younger brother.

Due to identity crisis the protagonist suffers, Kirika wonders whether Vic could have reciprocated the generosity he extends to him especially now that they were not biological brothers as the protagonist seems to think. This reckoning is thus explained:

But for my brother, I could have done anything, as I was sure he would have done for me. Or would? I now wondered, peering at him with slit eyes. Did he know what I had just learnt-that Father was not my biological father. That he was not a blood brother or whatever you called someone with whom you did not share a father? (5)

The description above depicts the persona's thought motif. It is tellingly punctuated with thought provoking questions which portrays Kirika's tortured mind as he is bristling with palpable doubt. This is as a result of the identity crisis he suffers.

The dichotomy between teenage and adult psychology is presented to us through the dialogue that ensues between the narrator and his mother. Whereas young people are depicted as candid and forthright, adults are variously portrayed as indirect and complicated. For instance, the narrator's mother is portrayed as complicated in the way she gives a circuitous answer to a direct question on Kirika's identity. Kirika wants to know whether he is, "... an adopted child?" (12) to which her mother evades by posing her own question, "How bad is your headache?" (12). This kind of dialogue is a reflection of the different terrains that the youth inhabit vis-a-vis that of the adults. Whereas young people's life is comparatively simple, adult life on the other is portrayed as chokingly complicated. It is from this observation that we authoritatively conclude that youth's experiences are completely dichotomous to that of the adults.



Through Kirika's character, young people are depicted as discreet and secretive. When faced with a major crisis in their lives such as Kirika's identity crisis, they opt to suffer silently albeit secretly trying to solve their problems. The authenticity of this assertion is manifested by Kirika's behaviour in the way he discretely tries to deal with his identity crisis. After getting a hint that he was born at Sheeba(Ngirigasha) hospital he is seen requesting permission from Uncle Ken

... to go to Sheeba. ... All the way? Not really?" I replied, determined to cover whatever distance needed to uncover the hidden truth of my parentage. "Go with Bernard..." "No!" I said quickly. Certainly I would not want to go with cynical Bernard anywhere. "Why don't you let me get the medicine, he doesn't need to make a trip as well.(35)

This above dialogue is a portrayal of the kind of secrecy that shrouds many a young person's life. Kirika like many other youths is determined to solve his own problems without involving other people.

Youth's creativity is intertwined with their identity. For instance, Kirika is fascinated by Zach's invention of a strange contraption he uses as a mobile charger. Working on his strange contraption, Kirika witnesses Zach "... spinning a bicycle wheel with his hand and there was a wire running from the wheel to a mobile phone on the ground" (74). This is the kind of technology: his own invention he used to charge mobile phones. Zach's invention is characteristic of the creativity displayed by many youths in Kenya. Such initiatives by the youth are at the core of their personal pride, esteem and identity. For instance, Zach is seen brimming with pride and a sense of self-importance as he answers a torrent of questions from a thoroughly fascinated Kirika. Unfortunately, many such creations tend to flounder at their

nascent stages for lack of moral and financial support especially in third world countries such as Kenya.

Young people find it hard to cope with romantic relationships because of their sharp sensibilities. For instance, Kirika is utterly embarrassed when family members pin him down concerning his relationship with Val. Val (Valerie) is just a class mate whose mother is involved in drug trafficking. In spite of the fact that there is no romantic relationship between Kirika and Val, his family members think otherwise. For instance, his father is seen inquiring, "Is she your girlfriend?" (100). This kind of question is too much for the sensitive Kirika who is "too startled to respond. I would never have imagined my father mentioning the word 'girlfriend' in front of me, let alone ask me if anyone was my girlfriend" (100). His father, however, is not deterred by Kirika's silence and is seen relentlessly repeating the question thus, "Well? is she your girlfriend?" he repeated when I did not respond. "No," I replied feeling extremely embarrassed" (100). Kirika's sensitivity mirrors one of the problems that bedevil the youth due to their emotionality and heightened sense of guilt.

Narrative voice is important in the novelistic discourse since it is one of the aspects of form that characterize this genre. In Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?* narrative voice is important since it reflects the problems that bedevil the protagonist who doubles as the first person narrator in the text. Through Kirika, Kabui has succeeded in narrating the theme of identity crisis since Kirika-the narrator and the protagonist-is the one who suffers the same. Moreover, the major action revolves around Kirika's person as most of the events take place in Kirika's mind. As a young man of adolescent age, Kirika's narration reflects the dichotomy that distinguishes the youth from adults in terms of thinking and action. The life inhabited by the

youths is simple and unpretentious whereas adult life is labyrinthine and thoroughly complicated.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The strength of Kabui's text hinges on its powerful deployment of plot. She has used a straight forward plot that moves back and forth from urban to rural setting to narrate the theme of identity crisis among the youth in contemporary Kenyan society.

In terms of characterization, Kabui's choice of characters, character mosaic and their role in the text is impressive. She settles on members of a nuclear and by extension that of the extended family as well as servants in the extended family for her characters. This is because the major theme in the text; identity crisis that the protagonist suffers is initiated and controlled by the forces operating within his family setting.

To develop her story Kabui has used a number of stylistic devices such as dialogue, description, rhetorical questions and imagery to explore her thematic concerns. The deployment of these artistic tools further attests to her creative genius in narrating the theme of identity crisis among the youth in contemporary Kenyan society.

Finally Kabui's use of first person narrative voice through the character of Kirika is important in capturing the thematic concerns. This is because Kirika a fifteen year old teenager is the protagonist and the narrator who suffers identity crisis. He is therefore a replica of other youths in contemporary Kenyan society. Kabui' artistic vision draws to the conclusion that the study of form can effectively be used to explore the contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE USE OF FORM IN NARRATING THE QUEST FOR UNITY IN ANTHONY MUGO'S *ASK THE STARS***

### **3.1 Introduction**

Anthony Mugo's, *Ask the Stars*, is an award winning book set in rural Kenya and specifically in a village called Mung'etho. It captures the acrid social conflict that threatens unity in Mukaru's family due to the children's sibling rivalry as result of identity crisis they suffer. The text also captures the disunity in Mung'etho community that is caused by various social conflicts such as the emergence of a rapist in the village, conflicting religious convictions and beliefs as well as the competing political interests. To capture these issues, I have analyzed Mugo's, *Ask the Stars*, using the parameters of form such as the character choice, the development of plot as well as the stylistic tools which include: imagery, proverbs, description and flashback.

In his novella *Ask the Stars*, Mugo depicts a loosely connected family whose unity is threatened by social tensions such as sibling rivalry, identity crisis, lack of stable financial income as well as external forces such as the rapist lurking in the village as well as the political intrigues. All the above are examples of contemporary issues that affect the youth in Kenya. Paradoxically, the same forces that threaten to tear the family asunder are the same that coheres it as depicted in Mugo's, *Ask the Stars*.

### **3.2 Synopsis**

Anthony Mugo's *Ask the Stars* is a story that narrates the conflict and disunity that engulfs Mukaru's family due to his children's identity crisis. The children in the protagonist's family belong to different biological parents which is a source great nail-biting tension and social conflict. For instance, Njorua and Antonnina are biological children of Mukaru and Ascar

Simane, whereas Mutuiria is the biological child of Mutumia Mutana and Ephraim Mutongoria, the area Chief who abandoned her when she was pregnant. This means that only Sarah belongs to Mukaru and Mutana. Due to this reason, Mukaru's family is constantly locked in mortal conflict as they come to terms with their predicament after their father's disclosure of their biological heritage. Mugo uses a complicated plot that mirrors the state of disunity and social conflict not only in Mukaru's family but the wider community in Mung'etho village as well. Some of the forces of conflict includes the political competition among politicians especially the area councillor. This conflict ends up sacking in other characters such as Njorua and Karobia, the councillor's son. Another source of conflict involves the competition for love between Karobia and the protagonist. Finally the emergence of a rapist in the village orchestrates the worst disunity in the village for it is punctuated with fear and palpable tension. The community as well as Mukaru's family is reconciled when Karobia, the rapist commits suicide. Karobia's suicide achieves poetic justice for the whole community and a chance of reconciliation.

### **3.3 Plot Development**

At the outset Mugo introduces us to the major conflict in the novella, which is the disunity in Muthuri Mukaru's family and Mung'etho community by extension as a result of various social conflicts. Mukaru is the adopted father of Titus Mutuiria, the protagonist. The very nature of Mukaru's family is a source disunity and conflicting tension especially to his teenage children. The children in the protagonist's family belong to different biological parents as a result of many unavoidable circumstances in their lives. For instance, Njorua and Antonnina are the biological children of Mukaru and Ascar Simane (4), whereas Mutuiria is the biological child of Mutumia Mutana and Ephraim Mutongoria, the area chief who abandoned her when she was pregnant (137). This means that it is only Sarah who belongs to

the current parents, that is Mutana and Mukaru (19). Like many other contemporary families in Kenya, Mukaru's is rather a peculiar family that prompts the protagonist remark, "Our family was a living mosaic whose pieces lacked harmony" (18). From this observation the family depicted above is a jumbled unit perilously connected together by a sort of puny forces of convenience. In the contemporary Kenyan society, this kind of family is a source of great socio-psychological distress especially to the children and youth due to emotional fragility at this tender developmental stage.

As a result of weak filial bonds, Mukaru's family faces an avalanche of social problems such as sibling rivalry and the threat of family collapse as manifested throughout the text. This is seen at the outset when we are introduced to the conflict between Mutuiria, and his stepbrother Njorua. As a result of sibling rivalry, the two youths are locked in a physical fight to determine who the king is in the unfolding conflict in their family. When Mukaru meets the duo locked in a brutal physical fight, he immediately decides to intervene. His mode of intervention is so unconventional since it involved supervised fighting rules that ensured that the two youngsters beat each other in turn using canning sticks that Mukaru orders them to get. This is a tactless way of fighting since as the protagonist remarks; their father was cunningly using them to punish themselves in the pretext of fighting (1). By introducing supervised methodical fighting, Njorua's father is trying to stamp his authority as seen where he says, "I am the law here and I say no to fighting. If you must fight join the army" (2). More so, through the methodical fighting where the two brothers savagely cane each other in turn is a kind of conditioned gag against fighting since at the end of this punitive act, they are seen begging for mercy thus, "I don't want to fight!... We don't want to fight... Please forgive us...." (2). These utterances corroborate the African wise saying that you can only fight fire with fire.

The acrid social conflict that threatens the protagonist's family unity is as a result of the revelation that the children in the family do not belong to the same biological parents. This revelation almost leads to the disintegration of Mukaru's family, a thing that greatly agonize the protagonist. Consequently, Mutuiria is seen wondering whether his "...father, a prudent man, had not foreseen the backlash that followed his ruinous revelation. Ours was no longer a family but persons entwined by circumstance. It was no longer a home but a battlefield" (5). The above statements are a reflection of how peace is shattered in Mukaru's family after the revelation of the children's filial identity. The statements also reflects Mutuiria's inner tension and by extension that of the family members especially his siblings. This is because in their tender age, they are overly sensitive as far as their identity is concerned. Like many contemporary youths in Kenya in similar circumstances, Mutuiria and his siblings are in dire need of identity which is at the core of their self-esteem and a feeling of personal security.

Due to the revelation of children's identity, the tension in the family shoots to crescendo to such an extent that it escalates into physical battle among the siblings. The fighting is ignited by Njorua, the most hot-tempered member of the family, when he beats his stepsister Sarah who emerges, "...from the kitchen screaming" (16), apparently because she has blocked his way. In retaliation, Mutuiria beats his stepsister Antonnina, an act that evokes Njorua's response when he "... unleashes terror," (16) on the two step siblings. In a spontaneous series of cause and effect Mutumia Mutana, the only parent around at that time is forced to punish Njorua to which he rudely objects, "Don't ever touch me again...You are not my mother but an immoral woman" (16). Njorua's pugnacious remark is an indication of the boiling inner tension and the volatility that is characteristic of many youths who are disillusioned in life mainly as a result of identity crisis. Like many other contemporary youths in Kenya who



happen to be in similar circumstances, Njorua is projecting his emotional stress on his stepmother whom he blames for his predicament.

As a result of the fight, a great division engulfs the family orchestrating the worst disintegration when Njorua and Antonnina, half of the siblings with distinct maternal identity, stomp out of the family's home. The other half of the family whose identity is represented by Mutumia Mutana also stomps out the family when the latter is bitterly castigated by her husband. This ugly fracas is narrated:

The situation escalated when Father arrived at three in the afternoon to learn that Njorua and Antonnina had left. For the first time he quarreled with my mother and I thought he would beat her up. He then left angrily. A few moments later mother took her bag and started stuffing items into it. (17)

From the above narration it is clear that the family has disintegrated right down the middle into two distinct subunits whose antithetical duality pivots around maternal identity. It is only Muthuri Mukaru who remains a neutral arbiter to the two factions in his family. As a result he is able to bring the family together due to his strength of character. This is the kind of father that the contemporary youth in Kenya in similar circumstances as Mukaru's children would be eager to emulate for he is a source of strength and a great role model.

As the plot unfolds the family grudgingly settles on a tenacious truce punctuated by alternating periods of peace and disunity. After a lull in hostility, the next salvo of disunity is thrown into the family by Njorua's intransigence. To avenge the perceived injustice occasioned by his conflicting maternal identity caused by her mother's separation with Mukaru, he decides to project his frustrations on his stepbrother, Mutuiria. When the latter

comes to school late, Njorua is seen commanding him to bring his mother (29). This episode brings a lot of tension in the family especially due to Njorua's callousness, for instance when he shouts at his stepmother, "Shut up!" (30). By shouting at his stepmother Njorua squarely falls into the category of disgruntled youths who bite the hand that feeds them. Many contemporary youths who are as insolent as Njorua are likely to end up burning bridges and dismantling vital human relationships in their lives leading to a state of despondency when left with nobody to help them.

The climax of hostility and tension in the family and by extension the whole Mung'etho community is brought about by the advent of a rapist wreaking havoc in the village. This unfortunate scenario is paradoxical since it brings tension and hostility on one side and cooperation on the other. In Mukaru's family the rape of Antonnina opens the old wounds of hostility in the family divide. When Mutuiria reports Antonnina's rape, Njorua hatefully responds, "Why was she alone?" (63).

When the protagonist responds that they were late, Njorua characteristically retorts, "You hate her!...You wish her away" (64). And then in his trademark fury, he kicks, "a nearby plastic basin that went into pieces" (64). Njorua's actions heighten tension in the family. This symbolizes how thoughtlessness among the youth due to their sometimes volatile emotions, can lead to family disunity and even break ups.

It is rare that a horrendous atrocity as rape can bring unity in a family as it does. When Antonnina is raped, the whole family is united in its action against this villainy. As a united front, Mukaru's family is ready to sacrifice its dignity and standing in the society by bringing in the sorcerer; an equally repulsive idea. When Mukaru broaches the idea of bringing the sorcerer, he immediately gets supports from the recalcitrant Njorua, "Let's invite him," (74).

The sorcerer's idea however elicits immediate antagonism from a number of Mung'etho villagers especially the Christians led by Kimotho the senior elder at the God's Church where Mukaru is also a leading Christian elder. This tension is highlighted by Kimotho's admonition of Mukaru thus:

You don't understand, do you?... This is not about you; this is a war between good and evil, between right and wrong. Do you know the tension you have created in Mung'etho? For heaven's sake, you are waging war against the church" (77).

The tension reaches a climax when members of the church adamantly refuse to toe the sorcerer's line by not taking the slices of bread he was administering as a form of oath to the community. The pandemonium that ensues is described as:

Events started unfolding too fast like the collapse of a house of cards. There was swearing, there was running, there was shouting; it was pandemonium. Then came a clear and authoritative burst of gunfire and I fell on my face. "You have ten minutes to disperse," one of the police officers said. (82)

This shows that as much as Mung'etho community is united against the rapist who had molested a number of young girls, some of the community's members such as the pious Kimotho are not ready to compromise their religious principles even if the lives of these youths (girls) is in peril.

Finally, Njorua and Mutuiria's united effort that help to apprehend the rapist wreaking havoc in the village is a manifestation of the latent energy that the youth possess. For the first time, the two antagonists are united towards the act of common good to the family and the

community. The duo's youthful vitality is manifested in their creativity where Mutuiria acts as a girl and Njorua a market woman. Their creativity is outlined in the words "Think of costumes. A wig, broadened hips, finer voice, some breasts..." (109). Their creativity is fruitful since it leads to the discovery that Karobia, the area councillor's son was the rapist. After Karobia is discovered as the village rapist, he commits suicide marking the climax of the story in the novella. It also brings a sense of relieve that is informed by the community's united effort the condemnation and fight against this heinous act.

### **3.4 Character and Characterization**

Mugo settles on a loosely-knit family brought together by forces of convenience for some of his characters. The narrator's father, Muthuri Mukaru is in his second marriage. He is currently married to Mutumia Mutana who has two children, the first born being the fruit of her relationship with the area chief who abandons her after learning that she is pregnant. By a dint of fate she, however, falls for Mukaru, a fellow broken soul after he is coincidentally forsaken by Ascar Simane (4) for another man. This means that Njorua and Antonnina are biological children of Muthuri Mukaru and his first wife Ascar Simane whereas the narrator is the son of Mutumia Mutana and the area chief, although the latter shirked his responsibility. Only Sarah, who is seven years old, wholly belongs to the current parents (19). This is a discordant combination in the family and a recipe for conflict.

It is impressive the way Mugo gives his characters symbolic names to depict their role in the text. In this respect, he gives his protagonist the name Mutuiria which is a Kikuyu name that means somebody with investigative qualities or somebody who behaves like a detective. The protagonist's father is named Muthuru Mukaru which means a respected elder who belongs to a council of elders. Other characters have also been given symbolic names with various

meaning. Mutumia Mutana means a generous woman, whereas Muteti is the name of a political figure in the society. All in all Mutuiria's brother is named Njorua which means somebody courageous. All the above names are meaningful in the way they conform to the characters' role in the text.

#### Titus Mutuiria

Titus Mutuiria is the protagonist in Mugo's *Ask the Stars*. He is also the narrator through whose perspective the story in the text unfolds. The name Mutuiria is symbolic. It means somebody with detective qualities. His name conforms to his role in the text since Mutuiria is the one who initiates an investigation that unearths the identity of the rapist who is wrecking havoc in the village. Mutuiria is variously depicted as overtly sensitive and possessive. When the bomb of identity crisis explodes on the family, he questions Njorua and Antonnina's dependence on his mother, Mutumia Mutana. This informs his jealousy towards his step siblings whom he views as parasitic. This is doubtlessly depicted when he says, "Jealousy invaded me. Why should anyone joyride on my mother?" (4). This utterance is as a result of the revelation that his mother is not the biological parent of Njorua and Antonnina.

Mutuiria's emotionality predisposes him as a person who is easily consumed by a sense of guilt. When the family almost disintegrates due to sibling rivalry between the two sets of siblings that is, Njorua and Antonnina on one side and Mutuiria and Sarah on the other, the protagonist is overtly consumed by guilt for he blames himself for the fracas that besets his family as he puts it, "Having contributed to the whole avalanche I felt remorseful" (17). This is after his fight with Njorua that almost obliterates his family. As in the case of Njorua, sibling rivalry is one of the contemporary issues that affects the youth in Kenya hence the social consequences on their developmental trajectory.

Through the character of Mutuiria, the issue of teenage love is highlighted. Mutuiria falls in love with his classmate, Joan. His love for Joan seems genuine for it is grounded in mutual attraction and care for each other. Like many other teenagers, Mutuiria's love for Joan is paradoxically a mixed bag of happiness and grueling tension. In the first place it is a source of happiness because it fills him with bliss and on the other it is a source of conflicting tension due to proximity as they are in the same class hence a source of disturbance as Mutuiria thus confesses:

Having a girlfriend in the same classroom proved both a source of joy and sorrow. Whenever I looked at her I thanked my luck, but a mere look of admiration from fellow male students was enough to make my blood boil. She was such a distraction that I hated my feeble willpower. (35)

The conflict brought about by this love affair is mainly ignited by the competition for Joan's love from other boys especially Karobia. As a result, Mutuiria like many youths in Kenya, paradoxically suffers from both the pangs of joy and arrows of frustration due to this sweet-bitter love affair.

Through Titus Mutuiria, the issue of talent-building among the youth in Kenya is evident. Mutuiria like many other youths in Kenya is depicted as quite talented. His artistic talents are easily recognized by his arts and crafts' teacher who asks him to paint his portrait. When he replicates it so exquisitely, the principal is overtly thrilled that he pays him, "to paint the president's portrait, which he hung in his office" (34). This is a motivating factor that greatly boosts his confidence and self-esteem. This contemporary issue is among the most fundamental factors that affect the youth in Kenya since it is at the core of their identity

formation. Youths who fail to identify their talents suffer identity crisis and become disenfranchised in life.

#### Muthuri Mukaru

He is the protagonist's step father and Antonnina's biological father; a child he got from his marriage to Mutana. He is also the biological father of both Njorua and Sarah from his previous marriage to Ascar Simane. Mugo depicts Mukaru as a strong willed patriarch who holds the family together. Without him there would be no family unity nor the family itself since he is the pivot that holds it together.

Mukaru's unflinching patriarchy is the glue that holds the family together and keeps it united in the face of excruciating adversity. To quell the ravenous sibling rivalry between Mutuiria and Njorua, Mukaru is seen applying draconian conflict resolution method where he orders the boys to fight using his rules. In this methodical fighting, "The rules were simple. We would cane each other in turns until the two sticks get broken into pieces. I was the first one to work on Njorua, my elder brother" (1). This is a harsh but practical method of conflict mitigation. Although it does not immediately unite the two brothers, it clearly draws the red line in the family and practically defines the filial power hierarchy. Mutuiria and Njorua's conflict is a test of the boundary of freedom and rights accorded to the youth. Young people are likely to wallow in apathy and disgusting sense of indiscipline in a situation devoid of clear boundaries and guidelines.

Mukaru's chivalrous dignity is an outstanding character trait that is easily fore-grounded in the text. His acts of generosity are analogous to mainstream religious' teachings that are emphatic on the decorum that emanates from helping people without shouting about it. Mukaru's capacity of helping people, sometimes total strangers without blowing his own

trumpet is awe striking. When he suffers from debilitating stroke, Mutumia Mutana pleads with the soldier for his car by reminding him how Mukaru had once helped him in his hour of need. She narrates this chivalrous act:

Some twenty or so years ago in the streets of Nairobi a young military officer was attacked by a gang, beaten senseless and left for dead... A good Samaritan took him to the hospital. He was lucky to recuperate but he could not rejoin the force... The Good Samaritan... He is in need and seeks your assistance.

(105)

This description which equates Mukaru to the Good Samaritan alludes to his finest deity-like traits. This revelation hits the protagonist like a thunder-bolt. Paradoxically this is the kind of an act that consternates and awe-strikes other people at the same time. To Mutuiria this is the kind of a role model that he requires to resolve his identity crisis. Consequently, he is no longer interested in his biological father for Mukaru is a perfect role model that many contemporary youths would wish to emulate.

Love is a dose that is acutely lacking in the lives of many contemporary youths in Kenya. The undying love Mukaru selflessly showers on his family is the antidote that reinvigorates and unites it. His ultimate act of love is seen when he saves the protagonist's mother from suicide. After conceiving Mutuiria, Mutumia Mutana mutates into a suicidal wretch after she is forsaken by the protagonist's biological father. Due to tense emotional distress, she attempts suicide by throwing herself down Rui Falls, a tragedy from which she is saved by an equally distressed Mukaru who is meditating in the nearby bushes after being abandoned by his first wife (20). This is the incidence that marked a turning point in their life hence their irrevocable love for each other.



Mukaru's deity-like persona is indelibly imprinted into the consciousness of the readers due to his ultimate sacrifice to his family when he brings in the "sorcerer" to deal with the rampaging rapist. His action is however a source of conflict in the Mung'etho community when he encounters various forces of resistance especially from the members of the Christian community led by Kimotho. It also causes socio-economical ruination of his family when he is disenfranchised of his hotel through Alfred's betrayal where he cunningly alleges that Mukaru is bewitching his customers.

Kabui has used Mukaru to narrate the theme of family unity in a climate beset with excruciating social conflict. He is the counter balance against the emotional fragility of his wife and children especially the intransigent Njorua. In this role he acts as the calming force especially when the family is threaten with disintegration. Through his deity-ike persona he saves his wife from attempted suicide when she threatens to throw herself down the Mui falls. He also saves Njorua's life through his forceful reasoning and character when the young man is alleged to have raped Janet, the chief's daughter. For this reason he earns their respect which is a powerful ingredient for family unity.

All in all he is the only member of Mung'etho community who is relaxed amid heightened social tension caused by the rapist wrecking havoc in Mung'etho village.

From the above observation it is clear that Mukaru is a force and a moral compass that brings unity in his family and Munge'tho community at large.

## Mutumia Mutana

Mutana is the second wife of Muthuri Mukaru since the latter was married to Ascar Simane, the mother of Njorua and Antonnina. Although Mutana is depicted as a dutiful wife, she is nevertheless not as strong as her heroic husband. Her character is not very well developed since her husband's almost larger than life figure easily eclipses her persona and role in the text.

Mutana is depicted as overly emotional, sensitive and rash. When the children's sibling rivalry and acrid conflict escalates into a physical fight that also draws the two parents into this ugly fray. Mutana decides to quit the family when the disrespectful Njorua abuses her, "Don't ever touch me... You are not my mother but an immoral woman" (16) and is later reprimanded by her husband. Consequently, "She packed a big bag and two small ones. It was now clear that we were hitting the road. As to our destination, I could only wait" (17). The above is an irrational act with the potential of tearing the family asunder. It completely threatens the family unit since Njorua and his biological sister had also left. It also depicts Mutana as rash and lacking in moral judgment as she had no specific destination.

Mutana's emotional drives can sometimes erupt to suicidal peaks. For instance, she attempts suicide when abandoned by her lover who had impregnated her. When she runs away with her biological children, Mutuiria and Sarah, Mutana is engulfed in the thoughts about her past which she narrates to her children:

Sometimes things go wrong... such was the case when I conceived you. There was this man I loved so much... Well, I promised to forgive and forget. When he left me I was so distressed I visited Rui Falls contemplating suicide. That is where I met Muthuri Mukaru..." (20).

This flashback is a clear indication of Mutana's suicidal inclination. However, she is fortunately saved by her chivalrous husband who is also her hero. For the second time, Mukaru saves her from herself when he comes for her in her night of wilderness to return her home where family unity is achieved.

On the positive side, Mutuma is portrayed as a caring and considerate woman. Her considerate nature is seen where she is always trying her best, "not to infuriate him because he has high blood pressure which gets really bad when he is angry" (21). The above description is a portrait of a caring and tolerant woman. She knows that the family's unity and survival depends on emotional and physical stability of its patriarch (Mukaru) and therefore does her best not to interfere with his well being. She is also seen nursing her husband throughout when he is struck by a minor stroke (106). All in all, her caring nature is manifested in the way she cares for all the children in spite of Njorua and Antonnina's hostility towards her. This helps to cement the family's unity and quell the sibling rivalry boiling among the children.

Mutana's role in the text conforms to symbolic meaning of her name which means a generous wife. This is depicted nurturing role where she cares for the children with discrimination in spite of Njorua and Antonnina's insolence and disrespect for her. She also cares for her husband unreservedly. For instance, Mutana cares for him unreservedly as a result of immobilization he suffers when he is struck by a minor stroke.

Njorua

Njorua is Mukaru's son with Ascar Simane. Mugo depicts Njorua as an ambivalent character who is heroic in some instances and a villain in others. This means that he is a hero on one hand and an antagonist in Mugo's *Ask the Stars* depending on circumstances. In his role as an

antagonist he acts as the catalyst that stirs major conflicts in the novella. On the other hand he is one of the characters that help in solving such tensions as the rape puzzle in Mung'etho community.

He is variously depicted as hateful and brutal. The book opens with a scene where he is fighting with his stepbrother Mutuiria in what turns out to be a rule-guided duel. His hateful nature is manifested by the size of the stick he wields against his brother. Mutuiria describes this situation thus "... his stick was thicker, which by father's inference, meant that he hated me more than I hated him" (1). With his thick stick, he proceeds to cane his brother to smithereens. This sibling rivalry is what orchestrates the worst family disunity threatening to tear it to pieces. Like most other bullies, Njorua cannot live and let others co-exist in the same family.

Njorua is also portrayed as a young man who is abusive and totally disrespectful. His callous intransigence is portrayed by his obscenity towards his stepmother. When his stepmother punishes him after he slaps Sarah, he has the temerity to tell her, "Don't ever touch me again... You are not my mother but an immoral woman" (16). His intransigence almost orchestrates family disintegration when Mutana runs away from the family's home with her biological children, immediately triggering a counter action from Njorua who together with his biological sister Antonnina, stomps from home to an unknown destination. Njorua's case is a reflection of many youths in Kenya who are trapped in a family beset with acrid conflict and tension leading to the projection of their painful emotionality on other family members and finding scape goats for their failures. Like many youths in such relationships, Njorua projects his hateful feelings towards his stepmother and his step siblings whom he blames for

his predicament as result of identity crisis he suffers after discovering that Mutana is not his biological Mother.

Njorua suffers identity crisis when he discovers that his biological mother-Simane-separated with his father. Due to his intransigence and hateful nature mainly, he consequently blames everything on the step members of his family. For instance, when he becomes an untrained teacher at Mung'etho Day secondary school, his insecurity due to the identity crisis he suffers is at full play. As a result of this, he projects it on his step brother where he is seen telling him, "Go bring your mother" (29). This is when his stepbrother comes to school late in the company of his girlfriend Joan. In a case of double standards, Njorua ushers in Joan and sends his stepbrother to specifically come with his mother. In the interlocution that ensues he is seen insolently asking his stepmother, "Why did you steal my father from my mother?" (30). His brutal question is the height of insolence that gravely strains the family unity.

The climax of Njorua's villainy is manifested when he bitterly quarrels with his father and "... even threatens to beat him up. Father lost his cool and the two argued hotly. Father complained of headache then collapsed" (103). The above episode is the last nail in the coffin that completely disrupts the family. It is what causes father, who is the moral anchor in the family, a minor stroke that leads to his immobilization. All the above incidences set Njorua apart as the embodiment of a sizeable number of youths who are completely lacking identity and are disillusioned in life. They are therefore a source of pain to themselves and the entire society.

Njorua's villainy is a little tempered by some bit of positive aspects that shines a ray of light on his crooked character. For one, he is confident and self-esteemed. His confidence and assured self-esteem is what endears him to the area councillor who engages him in his re-

election campaigns. He also becomes a PTA (Parents Teachers Association) teacher at Mung'etho Day Secondary School at a tender age. This is a big responsibility for Njorua who is in his early youth age. All the above is what culminates into his celebrity status as seen when he is alleged to have raped Regina, the chief's daughter. It is during this quagmire that Njorua's celebrity status galvanizes the youth's support against the area chief's led fracas. Thus, "A minute later Njorua emerged from the office to a deafening applause, his free hands raised above his head. Some boys surged forward, raised him shoulder-high and carried him out of the compound amid song and dance" (47). Such trait of self-assured esteem like in the case of Njorua, is an important cog in the life of the youth that acts as a barricade against identity crisis in their life. However if confidence and self-esteem are not tempered with humility, then the same can possibly explode into full-throttled braggadocio and eventual self-destructive hubris like in the case of Njorua. Furthermore, we cannot fail to admire Njorua for his boundless courage. During Mutuiria's clash with the villainous Karobia, Njorua's candour is in full display. He defends his brother with gusto by challenging Karobia to, "try someone" (58), of his size. After Karobia demurs, he further challenges him, "Let us solve it here and now!" (58). His brother cannot believe his eyes as Karobia runs away from this bare-knuckled challenge. With this momentous act of valour, Njorua is now a hero in the eyes of his brother. This is important since it greatly helps in withering their sibling rivalry culminating into family unity as seen at the end of the text.

In *Ask the Stars* Njorua is depicted as a complicated and dynamic character. He starts out as a villain and an anti-hero who however undergoes complete character transformation to a hero by the end of the text. As the story unfolds, his villainy is portrayed by his bitter altercation with his step siblings, his parents, Karobia and his father, Muteti; the area Chief as well as the police. By the time the story ends, he has transformed to embody heroic qualities of courage

and charisma. The latter role aptly marries with his symbolic name which means somebody courageous. His act of courage is depicted when he confronts the police in the local police station and castigates them for their incompetence. He also confronts Muteti and his son Karobia after their political fall-out. More so, his courage is depicted as boundless when he confronts his father after the latter pays dowry with the only cow in the family. It is due to his heroic character that he is saved by his fellow youths when he is alleged to have raped the chief's daughter. The climax of his heroism is depicted when he helps his brother Mutuiria unearth the rapist in Mung'etho village. Clearly his heroism easily eclipses his villainy hence the readers' admiration for Njorua.

#### Karobia

Karobia is the son of the area councillor and the protagonist's classmate. He is depicted as the arch-villain and the major antagonist in the novella. His spoilt nature is perhaps informed by his class background. Being the area councillor's son puts him in a privileged class status with the trappings of wealth at his disposal. His villainy therefore is a depiction of the general malice that many a times plagues the political class leading to the destruction of children in such families. To start with, Karobia is depicted as an immoral character exhibiting total moral decadence. As the major antagonist in the text, he is seen competing with Mutuiria for the latter's girlfriend. His motive of wooing Joan, Mutuiria's girlfriend, is however malicious as he has no qualms sleeping with her or any other girl to satisfy his lust. Like many other spoilt youths, he easily engages in premarital sex as is demonstrated by his nagging question to Mutuiria when he asks him, "By the way, have you slept with her?" (57). When the protagonist answers to the contrary he derisively tells him that, "She needs a real man who can give her what she wants. You know, a little stroking, a little fondling, some caressing and a lot of bang bang" (58). The above conversation depicts Karobia as a character suffering

from complete moral vacuity just like many other contemporary youths in Kenya. This behaviour is an eye sore and a source of disunity in the Mung'etho community since it leads to his fight with the protagonist and a chilling antagonism with Njorua, his former ally now turned foe.

Karobia also comes out as a perverted character as is depicted by his addiction to pornography. Joan reports that Karobia "... is so sick. You know, watching adult movies, nudes..." (121). These words depict Karobia as a spoilt brut who, like many other contemporary youths in Kenya are completely addicted to pornography leading to moral decay and tension in the society.

Karobia's advancing crudeness metamorphoses into callous villainy when he graduates from pervasion to a sadistic rapist wrecking havoc in Mung'etho village. In his callousness, he rapes Rose (the mentally-challenged girl who was closest to delivery), Antonnina (the protagonist's stepsister), Jacinta (a village girl) and Janet (the Chief's daughter) (78-79). This act of rape marks the climax of Karobia's callousness leading to heightened tension in Mung'etho community. This action is ironically paradoxical for it splits the community along religious lines when the protagonist's father brings in the sorcerer. On the other hand it solidifies the communal will against this vile act for it touches almost every member of Mung'etho community in a tumultuous way including the area chief (whose daughter is raped) and the area councillor whose son, Karobia, is the rapist in the village. The ugly circus ends in Karobia's ignominious death when he commits suicide hence poetic justice for the entire community which is finally cleansed of the evil.



## Ephraim Mutongoria

He is the area chief and one of the antagonists in Mugo's *Ask the Stars*. His surname, Mutongoria, symbolically means a great leader. His naming is however, ironical since his character traits and role in the text is opposite of the connotative meaning implied by the name. We would have expected him to exhibit astute leadership qualities; but instead Mutongoria is depicted as one of the anti-heroes and a catalyst of strife and disunity in Mung'etho community.

To start with, Mutongoria is depicted as utterly irresponsible. After he impregnates his fiancée, Mutuiria's mother, Mutongoria abandons her by renegeing on his promise to marry her. After this experience, Mutuiria's mother is so forsaken and despondent that she attempts suicide at Mui falls (20). Later on Mutuiria suffers identity crisis as a result of Mutongoria's irresponsibility that brings a lot of tension between him and his stepsiblings especially Njorua. The conflict between the two is a cause of great disunity in Mukaru's family.

The Chief is also portrayed as egocentric due to his warped sense of justice and from the way he selectively serves his people. After the rape of his daughter, Mutongaria is more wholeheartedly involved in search of the rapist than when Jacinta and Rose are molested. This incident is narrated thus "The incident revived memories of Jacinta and Rose. As they say, the burial of the rich is more celebrated than the wedding of the poor. Janet's rape, since she was the chief's daughter, put the minds of the village folk into high gear" (41). This kind of selective justice is a cause of great conflict in any community and so is Mung'etho. It paints Mutongoria as totally insensitive to the plight of other people's children. He has completely failed in his duty since as the government representative at the grass root; he is

the custodian of their security. As a figure in a position of leadership, Mutongoria symbolizes of social injustices such as bad governance, selfishness, incompetence and irresponsibility. .

Moreso, Mutongoria comes out as dictatorial and rigid. When Njorua is falsely accused of rape, the chief's dictatorial tendency is depicted in the way he refuses to accommodate opinion contrary to his own. This is described thus, "Apparently the chief's court had already decided on a guilty verdict for the accused and any contrary view was considered retrogressive and a challenge to the elders wisdom" (45). When Mukaru and one of the elders try to reason with him, the Chief responds sternly "This is getting us nowhere. Kiaro it will be" (45). The above utterance is a reflection of the chief's thoughtlessness and draconian behaviour that brings a lot of strife in Mung'etho community especially when youths demonstrate in support of Njorua. The youth's reaction portrays Mutongoria as a catalyst of conflict and disunity in Mung'etho community.

#### Philip Muteti

He is the area councillor and Karobia's father. His name symbolically means a political leader. This marries with his role since as a local politician he has tremendous influence in the lives of people in Mung'etho community. He is sufficiently rich and powerful. . He represents the ruling class and the power echelon in the society.

The councillor is depicted as an opportunist who takes advantage of other community members especially the youth. In a use and dump fashion that characterises many political dealings, the area councillor is the kind of a man who takes many youth people such as the charismatic Njorua into his political fold and dumps them later after the political deal is done. For instance, Njorua's fury for being used and dumped by the area councillor is described:

Njorua had been ranting tirelessly about being used and then dumped by Karobia's father. Apparently, the councillor had used Njorua's accusation to instigate his sacking so that he could secure the teaching post for his nephew" (57).

The councillor's action as described above is informed by egocentrism and nepotism that does not augur well for peaceful coexistence in the society.

Apart from Njorua, Muteti takes advantage of other young men such as Karimi; his houseboy. This situation is thus described "Philip Muteti had promised him a job two years ago, but told him to be working in his farm in the meantime 'so that he is not forgotten'" (124). In this respect Muteti is like many other politicians who misuse other people especially the youth for their selfish gains after which they dump them. In this respect Karimi will perhaps never get the job he has been promised. Like many other politicians in contemporary Kenya, the area councillor is like a fox that devours the society for their selfish ends. This is very frustrating especially for the youth who have to contend with a state of joblessness in Kenya. These are some of the things that breed bitterness and disharmony in society.

Furthermore, Muteti is depicted as insensitive. During public demonstration in condemnation of the rapist, Mukaru takes advantage of the crowd congregated at the village square in Mung'etho. Muteti-the ever self-centred politician-has no qualms using this 'God-given' opportunity to address his political interests instead of rape. He tells the crowd:

The Honourable member of parliament and I are pushing the government really hard, day and night... If you vote us back, by this time next year we should be having a tarmac road, a police station, a better hospital and a polytechnic for our children. (73)

This speech portrays Muteti as utterly selfish and callously insensitive to the feelings and aspirations of the common citizenry. In his role Muteti represents many other politicians who are only interested in their selfish gains at the expense of everybody else in the society.

### **3.5 Stylistic Devices used in the Story**

Mugo's *Ask the Stars*, is a captivating story whose masterfully woven style attests to the author's artistic creativity. To achieve his artistic vision, Mugo uses a number of stylistic devices such as description, flashback, proverbs and dialogue among others.

#### **3.5.1 Flashback**

Flashback is an element of narration that helps in revealing the past events and how they actually happened. Flashback is important as Barry asserts, in filling “us in on things that happened earlier” (145). From the above observation, it is clear that flashback is an important stylistic device that helps in the authentication of the past experiences in the lives of the characters hence its importance in the development of thematic concerns.

It is through flashback that the genesis of the conflict that bedevils Mukaru's family is introduced. The protagonist narrates, "The animosity in the family had started two years before" (3). This animosity arises as a result of the hitherto hidden secrecy, revealed by Mukaru (protagonist's Father), that ends up revealing the children's filial identity. (3-4) Through this revelation, we come to know that Antonnina and Njorua are the children of Mukaru's first marriage to Simane, whereas Mutuiria is the biological child of Mutana with Mutongoria, the area Chief. Only Sarah belongs to the current parents that is Mutana and Mukaru. (3-4) This kind of revelation is emotionally constraining to Mukaru's adolescent children: an age that is beset with emotionality and acrid sensitivity.

Mutuiria, the protagonist, confesses that Mukaru is not the kind of a man to forsake his family. The only time the protagonist feels forsaken by Mukaru is during his birthday, which he relieves through a flashback. He says that the only time Muthuri Mukaru let him down was on his fourteenth birthday (29). The episode above portrays the different psychological terrain inhibited by adults vis-a-vis the youth. Like many other youths, Kirika would have wished that Mukaru gives him fancy birthday presents since youths are inclined to fantasy which sharply contradicts with the' cold realism of adults. By giving him a Bible, Mukaru hopes to inculcate spirituality in the life of the protagonist which to a large extent is a basis of discipline and morality in the life of the youths.

Academic achievement by young people is at the centre of their identity today. Those who fail in academics and do not succeed in any other undertaking in life end up disillusioned in life. Mutuiria's failure in academics is brought to us through flashback. He thus describes this situation:

I was sitting in class when my mind travelled back to five years before It was the closing day, back then the most unwelcome day in my life. It was always wonderful to be out of school for a while, of course, but closing day meant taking home a report form. I was not particularly good in academics and on this occasion I was number twenty-five out of thirty" (33).

This is a very frustrating situation which forces the protagonist to doctor the report form to reflect brighter academic results. On this day however he is not very fortunate for he is caught in the act. This brings a lot of tension between Mutuiria and his stepfather, Mukaru hence a source of disharmony in the family. Like many Kenyan youth today, Mutuiria's

experience is a bitter pill to swallow. It is characteristic of failed identity hence utter confusion in a young person's life.

The identity of Mutiria's biological father is revealed through flashback. After a long duration marked with mind-nagging suspense, Mutana finally reveals the identity of his son's biological father. This is through a photograph that Mutwiria describes:

The Chief's youthful face smiled mockingly at me and I suppressed the urge to scream. My mother stood next to him, looking lovely in a *kitenge* and high heels. In other circumstances she would have been described as blissful and prudent but now she gave the impression of a docile, vulnerable, love-intoxicated girl. (137)

From the diction the narrator employs in the above description, it is clear that Mutuiria's association with the area chief is not a source of consolation as his mother thought it would be. Instead it is a source of excruciating psychological pain and internal conflict. On the other hand, however, the revelation helps in plot development as one of the elements of denouement where Mutuiria resolves to abandon his search for paternal identity and instead embrace the caring Mukaru as his rightful father. By doing so, he is able to reconcile with the inner self and his family. Consequently, he achieves inner peace as well as unity in his family.

### **3.5.2 Proverbs**

In *Ask the Stars* Mugo has extensively used proverbs to communicate his thematic concerns. Proverbs are wise sayings that communicate folk wisdom. S. Kichamu Akivaga and Asenath Bole Odaga's define of proverbs in *Oral Literature: A School Certificate Course* as "a collection of peoples' experiences some which have been learned the hard way. They reveal what it is that people adore, and what they despise. They reveal what a people's attitude

towards life is” (110). Following the definition above we can say that Mugo’s use of proverbs is aimed, on one hand at revealing the positive issues such as Mukaru’s charisma, Mutwiria apt talent and Njorua’s bravery among others. On the other hand his use of proverbs is geared towards the exposition of the malevolence in the society as epitomized by such heinous action like rape among others in Mung’etho community.

Mukaru's family is plagued by heavy tension brought about by the mixed nature of their parental identity. After Mukaru's revelation of this unpalatable truth about his family's filial mosaic, his family almost disintegrates when the two parties of the divide storm out of the family home to their different destinations. Mutana and her two biological children, Mutuiria and Sarah, end up in a distance village. Due his mother's cluelessness, the trio are stranded as captured by the proverb, "You can't force miracles; you can only hope and wait for them" (21). Mutana uses this proverb to ward off her children's nagging especially from Sarah who incessantly complains of hunger and her urge to go home. The proverb is also a tacit indictment against family disunity and its consequences.

Mukaru is portrayed as a wise patriarch and an indomitable anchor who unites his family. After the return of his family, Mukaru is seen drumming the importance of family unity by the use of a proverb, "Milk and honey have different colours, but they share the same house peacefully" (27). Through this proverb, Mukaru hopes to persuade his family against blame game occasioned by the children's identity crisis. The mixed nature of their filial identity is a shocking reality they cannot change. Like many other contemporary youths in Kenya faced with similar situation, Mukaru's family has to accept the reality and move on.

After Njorua enlists as a political campaigner for the incumbent councillor, he falls out with his father for refusing to heed his wise counsel. His father warns him against the cunningness

of the politicians. He is seen telling him, "No matter how far your urine jet goes, the final drop lands on your feet" (28). Njorua's father knows that politicians will typically exploit the young man and then abandon him after his services are no longer needed. This comes to pass when Njorua is sacked only to be replaced with the councillor's relative. This act causes a lot of conflict between Njorua's and the councillor's family. This experience is however like a double edged sword for apart from its poignant ramifications it is very important to Njorua for it jolts him back to reality and to some extent reconciles him to his family. Like a wounded tiger, he realizes that east or west, home is the best.

The protagonist's father is keen on his children's education and upward mobility in life. He encourages Mutuiria to work hard in spite of his failing grades. Recognizing the protagonist's disillusionment in academics, he advises the young man to recognize that life, "is like riding a bicycle uphill-once you stop peddling you fall on the wayside" (34). Mukaru's proverb is a wake-up call for perseverance and persistence to the youth; important principles that can help them achieve their life's goals. It also helps in cementing unity in the family: for it makes Mutuiria realize that his is not a hopeless case hence reconciling his pricked sense of self-esteem.

Mukaru's words are indelible in the protagonist's mind. This is manifested in the latter's resolve to work very hard. To achieve his goals in academics, he borrows a leaf from his father's true albeit hard-hitting counsel: "You can't have a baby in a month by making nine women expectant" (38). Like many African proverbs, Mukaru's is nerve-racking although the message is, "deep and provoking" (38), for the narrator realizes that he has, "to work hard every passing second but not hope to put an elephantine effort at the eleventh hour" (38-39). The wisdom loaded in this proverb is of great importance to Mutuiria and many other



contemporary youths in Kenya. It is a call to systematic working on one's life goals and smartness for there is no shortcut to success in life. It also brings harmony in the family by making the protagonist realize his father's love and concern for him and the entire family.

The narrator admits that Njorua had "become the family black sheep and seemed to enjoy it" (28). This is evident as Njorua stoops so low to an extent that he even beats-up girls he accuses of stealing his hard-earned cash. This action causes a lot of friction in his family as well as Mung'etho community prompting his father's warning, "First a fool and his money part ways then he washes his dirty linen in public" (49). These proverbs allude to Njorua's foolishness which cost him money apart from exposing him to shame. His father's sarcastic remark is provoked by the fracas that ensues after their quarrel over Njorua's maternal identity.

Due to Mukaru's complicated family mosaic, he realizes that unity is almost a utopian concept in his situation. This is mainly contributed by his young children's emotionality. Like any other contemporary youth, his children are at the adolescent stage hence the vulnerability of their feelings. Due to his optimistic nature, Mukaru does not tire in drumming up the need for family unity. Consequently, he advises them "Never make a decision when you are mad" (59). Mutuiria remembers the reality of this statement in his conflict with Karobia. Karobia is locked in a mortal showdown with both Mutuiria and Njorua. The conflict between Njorua and arises when the former is sacked from his teaching job through the instigation by Karobia's father. On the other hand Karobia locked in a dire competition with Mutuiria for Joan's love. Their conflict is characteristic of socio-psychological problems that afflict many youths in contemporary Kenya resulting to tension between families as well as the wider society.

After so much tension in Mung'etho society and socio-economic devastation of the protagonist's family caused by lose of the hotel, which is the family's economic life-line, Mukaru bitterly remarks, "Now I know that it is better to travel alone than with a bad companion" (142). This is after Mukaru's betrayal by Alfred who malevolently accuses him of bewitching his customers (98). This betrayal causes a lot of tension between Alfred and Mukaru's family. It is a great lesson to Mukaru and more so, to his young children against trusting everybody even the greatest of friends.

It is evident that most of the proverbs are uttered by Mukaru to his young children in his endeavour to mould them into responsible adults for he understands that "the boy is the father of man" (34) and that the society borrows its life from the youth. In African society, proverbs are used mainly by elders to pass wisdom from one generation to the other. In our case Mukaru is the elder trying to counsel the young generation that is embodied by his young children. Through proverbs Mukaru is able to community the truth as unpalatable as it is since as Okumba Miruka asserts in *Encounter with Oral Literature*, that a proverb is "a brief statement full of hidden meaning, accepted and used by a community as an expression of truth or wisdom" (47). In essence Mukaru's proverbs are a source of folk wisdom that brings his family together. They also show the importance of investing in the youth since these are the bedrock upon which the society is built.

### **3.5.3 Imagery**

In the *Ask the Stars*, Mugo uses figurative language such as similes, metaphors and a host of other devices to make his work aesthetically captivating. Such images are important in the way they captivate the imagination of the readers to visualize the textual message.

Mukaru's revelation of his children's filial heritage is the genesis of the conflict in the family. This fact does not escape the narrator's young instincts prompting him to metaphorically label his father "a gifted troubleshooter" (5). After this awful incidence, the plot, throughout the text is dominated by Mukaru's persistent endeavour to, "repair the rift caused by his disclosure" (5). This is a difficult task mainly due to his young children's fragile emotional disposition. Like many other youths, the children's boiling emotions is a great hindrance to the task of reconciliation.

After realizing that Mutana is not his biological mother, Njorua is intent on revenging against the protagonist. To succeed in his pernicious mission Njorua, forever the catalyst of conflict in Mukaru's family, hits Mutuiria with this cruel revelation that Mukaru is not his biological father. This turns out to be an excruciating experience for "Njorua's words were like a recurring decimal" (12) in Mutuiria's head. After this experience, Mutuiria's soul is inconsolable. He is completely thrown off balance as he says, "I was walking on quicksand just when I thought I had a strong foothold" (16). Like many other contemporary youths in Kenya facing similar circumstances, he embarks on a spirited effort to unearth his filial roots which ends in his acceptance of his apparent reality that his biological father-the area chief-will never accept or care for him the way Mukaru does.

Njorua's tumultuous persona is a great burden to Mukaru's family. So intransigent is he that he even quarrels with his own father over his maternal heritage. Njorua thinks that his father owes him an apology for denying him the right to be raised by his biological mother. A straight shooter, Njorua lectures his father, "I know that I deserve a mother but you took this right away because of her (Mutana) (49). This intransigence is so much that it ruffles the ever serene Mukaru who is now described as being, "so irate he was shaking like a leaf" (49). For

the disciplined Mukaru this kind of fury is rare. So furious is he that he hits Njorua, "Your mother cared less. She ran away with another man before you even knew her" (49). Like many other contemporary youths, this crude revelation is so much for Njorua who "... appeared as though he had been hit by a train" (49). To Njorua, like any other contemporary youth in his situation, this reality is too cruel but sobering. This is an important experience in trimming Njorua's arrogance as well as acting as a precursor to his reconciliation with the family. Njorua's heartlessness finally results to his father's debilitation when the latter suffers a minor stroke. After witnessing his father's collapse, the protagonist is overcome by emotions. Consequently, his "heart started beating like an Akorino drum" (103). Mutuiria's emotions betray the tension that is palpable in the family. Njorua the source of the current fracas as well as most other conflicts in the family is like many other despotic youths in contemporary Kenya who insists on being the eyesore in their families.

Apart from the protagonist's family, Mugo has used elaborate imagery to describe the forces at play in Mung'etho community. This is a community besieged by the malevolence of a callous rapist in the village. The rapist's weakness is accentuated by the rape of Janet, the chief's daughter. Describing this act, the protagonist says, "Word spread like bush fire in the village..." (40). This hullabaloo is obviously expected due to Janet's socio-economic class-- for she is the chief's daughter-- since " the burial of the rich is more celebrated than the wedding of the poor" (41). This is a reality that exposes the ugly underbelly of class struggle in the contemporary Kenyan society.

During the identification parade of the alleged culprit, the Chief's (Janet's father) commitment to this particular case is unmistakable. As Janet and her father walk up and down the line of hooded men, it is described how "The chief shadowed her looking like a predator ready to

pounce on its prey. His officers followed him closely” (41). This episode is ironical in the way it exposes the double standards that the Chief exhibits in this case. He does not care about other victims who are not his children. The Chief's actions mirror the treatment given by leaders to the contemporary youth in Kenya. This discriminatory treatment punctuated with nepotism is a recipe for conflict in the Kenyan society and Africa at large.

More so, Mukaru's decision to bring a sorcerer is a source of great tension in Mung'etho. Consequently, Mukaru's family is ostracized by the whole community. The intensity of hatred towards Mukaru's family is metaphorically captured by the preacher who "talked of the devil incarnate..." (86). This description paints Mukaru and by extension his family in callously unflattering words. Like many other youths, this situation slaps his young children with an avalanche of turmoil and guilt. This is evident from the way everybody was staring at the protagonist with so much hostility during the church service. Mutuiria's situation is a replica of the tension that affect many Kenyan youths when faced by similar circumstances. The unfolding story climaxes with the revelation that Karobia is the village rapist. This revelation strikes Mung'etho village like a thunderbolt. This shock is epitomized by Njorua's reaction when he "looked as though he had swallowed a toad" (121) after the revelation. Like many others in Mung'etho community, Njorua cannot believe his ears. Karobia is the son of the area councillor, who should be the epitome of morality and a role model to other youths. His villainy is an example of moral rottenness that beset a number of young Kenyans today. At the end of the text, there is a sense of *déjà vu* in Mung'etho when Karobia commits suicide. This is a kind of poetic justice for the community and a tacit lesson to all, especially the youth, that actions have consequences.

### 3.5.4 Description

The text starts with a background of conflict generated by sibling rivalry in Mukaru's family. This is especially between Njorua and the protagonist after their father's revelation of their filial heritage. When Mukaru meets Njorua and Mutuiria fighting, his strictness is depicted by the methodical duel he conducts between the two adversaries:

The rules were simple. We would cane each other in turns until the two sticks get broken into pieces. I was the first one to work on Njorua, my stepbrother. Quick analysis told me that I was the underdog since Njorua was more energetic and his stick was thicker, which by father's inference, meant that he hated me more than I hated him. (1)

The above description portrays Mukaru as a strict disciplinarian who would not brook conflict and disunity among his children. This is a great lesson to his children as well as other youths in the face of permissiveness in the contemporary Kenyan society.

After Njorua discloses Mutuiria's paternal heritage, the truth hits the protagonist so hard that it takes him long to recover. Consequently, he embarks on a relentless search for the elusive truth. In this agonizing endeavour we encounter him rummaging through the family album which is thus described:

Early in the morning, I took the family album and began going through it, studying each photograph closely. Soon, some disturbing traits that I had never noticed before became apparent. I had a high forehead, a long face, thick eyebrows and my front teeth slanted outwards. These features contrasted sharply with those of the rest of my family members. That settled it, or did it? Heavens above, just where was the truth? (12)

By doing so, Mutuiria is trying to compare his physical features vis-a-vis that of other family members. His actions is a physical manifestation of the inner turmoil that assaults his persona and by extension other members of his family. Like any other youth, it is very hard for Mutuiria and the siblings to cope with the uncertainty occasioned by their identity crisis.

The protagonist's love for Joan and the conflict it occasions is thus described:

... How could I revise when I felt so insecure in my relationship with Joan? The very thought of having a competitor for Joan, worthy or not, was disturbing indeed. I produced her and studied it intently. She was a heavenly beauty; brown, sensual and trim... Owing to magnetic nature of beauty, I knew there were several suitors out there. However, having the identity of someone so daring meant a bigger threat. I couldn't afford to lose her. (39)

Muturia and Joan's relationship symbolizes the romance and sexual relationships among the youths in. Like any other youth in his situation, Mutuiria finds it hard to juggle his cards between love and academic pursuit hence the inner tension he experiences. It is also a source of conflict in the society as mirrored by the antagonistic competition between Karobia and Mutuiria for Joan's love.

The news that Mukaru would bring a sorcerer in Mung'etho village is like a bombshell owing to the hullabaloo it generates. The events of the day are colourfully described:

On the D-day our procession started at home. We were armed with drums, whistles and a horn speaker. After howling for ten solid minutes we had a crowd big enough to start marching through the streets. Antonnina led the way as we proceeded to collect Rose, the very first victim who was seven months pregnant,

then Jacinta, then Janet, finally entering the village square, a cloud of dust dancing above our heads. (78)

From the words above it is clear that the day was colourful. Besides their father, Mutuiria and Njorua's commitment to the success of the day is evident. Their dedication is a reflection of the youth's commitment and energy they channel towards whatever they put their minds to. It also acts as an avenue for the family's reconciliation as they put their differences together towards the success of this common cause. On the contrary however, Mukaru's undertaking is a source of tension and disunity in Mung'etho community.

The existence of a rapist is a source of great tension in Mung'etho community. The whole society agonizes as a result of his malevolence against the young girls since youth is the source of life and hope for the whole society. This experience is beset with bitter irony for it galvanizes the community against therapist. This is seen during their frantic search for the villain. This scenario is vividly described:

I said working my way up the tree. The maize field covered about an acre. Maize stems danced at different spots, a sign of frantic individual initiative to net the villain. This mode of search, or rather lack of it, was very disturbing, not only because of the high risk, but also the possibility of the rapist losing himself among the searchers. I could hardly tell who was where from my watch tower since the maize stems covered humanity crisscrossing about them like blood in the veins. (116)

After this relentless search, they only succeed in retrieving, "a hooded sweatshirt and a balaclava" (117). These are important clues that help in the identification of the rapist later on.



As the curtain falls on the plot, the fiasco that characterizes Mukaru's actions when he brings the sorcerer is revealed. The whole drama is thus described:

That morning our brother Mukaru visited me is still fresh in my mind. He told me about the temptation he was going through. And then he told me that he intended to lie. His lie would accomplish two things: he would deliver a sermon he always wanted but never had a chance, which he called 'true worship'. Secondly, with luck, he would stop the rapist who has been haunting your village. I agreed but with a condition. I would not vouch for his innocence. He told me that he had a respectable neighbour privy to the plan and would reveal the truth the day after. (142)

This revelation is shocking and relieving at the same time. It serves to reveal Mukaru as a foxy man who is extremely cunning beneath the aura of innocence and benevolence. As a result, he is a source of great admiration for his youthful children especially the protagonist who remarks, "What an extraordinary man" (141). Effectively, he is a role model to the youth. It also marks the end of the conflict in Mung'etho community and a sense of relief in Mukaru's family.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Anthony Mugo's *Ask the Stars* is set in rural Kenya specifically in a village called Mung'etho. In respect to its setting the text helps the readers to understand the forces and intricacies that control life in a typical rural setting.

Furthermore, Mugo has used an impressive character mosaic that collocates heroic characters such as Mukaru, Mutuiria against villains such as Korobia, Muteti among others. In terms of

age, these characters are a syncretic group of young as well as the old, an aspect that helps in the portrayal of the dichotomy in their world view and their perspective in life.

Through the use of various aspects of form based on the parameters of prose fiction such as plot, character and characterization and the mechanics of the story, which include: flashback, description, imagery and proverbs, Mugo has succeeded in producing a spectacularly beautiful text that narrates the issue of unity in Mung'etho community.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE USE OF FORM IN REVEALING THE EFFECTS OF DRUG ABUSE IN

#### MORAA GITAA'S *THE SHARK ATTACK*

##### 4.1 Introduction

In *The Shark Attack* Moraa Gitaa tackles the issue of drug abuse especially among the youths in Kenya and its effects. Gitaa's book is set in Mombasa, the second largest city in Kenya. Being a port city, Mombasa is throbbing hotbed of drug trafficking and abuse. This is perhaps due to its connection with the outside world as the sea route to Kenya. It is in this port city that drugs such as bhang, cocaine, heroin and Mandrax are trafficked with impunity. Their effects includes, addiction, transmission of deadly diseases through injection, reduction of victims to zombies, depletion of economic resources as most of the money is spent in purchasing of drugs or even death as epitomized through the characters of Kadzo, Kenga and Issa.

##### 4.2 Synopsis

Gitaa's *The Shark Attack* is set in the Kenyan coastal city of Mombasa. It narrates the story of three teenagers; Kadzo, Kenga and Issa who are involved in drug use and peddling. In this dangerous trade, the trio is working for the drug kingpin by the name Mustapha Jillo alias Bigman alias Mono-eye. Things go wrong when Mono-eye decides to eliminate the trio after they decline to continue with the trade. By a wad of fate they are saved by a sudden explosion in the mother-ship mono-eye uses for ferrying the drugs which includes heroin, cocaine, Mandrax among others. The rest of the plot involves a nerve-wracking showdown mainly between Kadzo and Inspector Korir on one side and Mono-eye and his drugs cartel on the other. Finally the drug lord is apprehended together with his henchmen. In a twist of irony

however, mono-eye and some of his henchmen escapes from the jail. The momentary success however earns Kadzo the head of state commendation among other awards apart from a chance to read her essay titled "THE KENYA I DO NOT WANT TO LIVE IN". Apart from Kadzo Inspector Korir earns promotion to the rank of police boss in the county of Mombasa.

### **4.3 Plot Development**

Gitaa's *The Shark Attack* is a resounding indictment of the monstrosity of drugs in Kenya . This is exemplified by the opening incidence where Kadzo, Kenga and Issa are involved in an accident after a "mother ship" (1), loaded with drugs explodes in the high seas. This explosion is like a miracle wand that saves them from the beast of death sanctioned by their estranged Boss also known as Mustapha Jillo alias Bigman (1). After the explosion, Mustapha Jillo is interrupted from undertaking his evil intentions when all of them are thrown into the sea. This opening action is important since it introduces us to the major characters as well as the major conflict in the novella.

The explosion is followed by an excruciating episode where Kadzo is attacked by a shark in the Indian Ocean. This incident is described in these words:

As Kadzo flailed against the strong current, she felt the shark head butt her twice and then a huge clamp close around her left leg. The pain was excruciating. She screamed. The shark yanked her below the water surface, swung and jerked her through the water like a piece of damp sea weed. Instinctively, her right hand lunged down and grappled over the shark's tough skin until she felt the soft hollow of the shark's eye socket and tore it with her fingers. The huge clamp loosened, albeit momentarily. (6)

This painful experience is like a double edged lance with a mixed fortune for Kadzo. To start with, it leads to the amputation of the protagonist's leg at the knee causing her an irreversible

disability. On the other hand it acts like a powerful jerk that bombards her consciousness hence her determination to fight the menace and redemption. This is a painful lesson to Kadzo who acts as the mirror for other Kenyan youth. More so, it is from this painful experience that the book owes its title.

During the recovery period Kadzo undergoes a lot of pain as a result of drug-induced withdrawal syndrome that overshadows the pain from her wounds. This experience is thus narrated:

She had seen people suffer when denied cocaine or heroine but she had never imagined that she could also go through the same. She had seen them tremor, wade in mud in a bid to cool the body, undress and mutter incoherent speeches like people out of the world and somehow she never understood them. It was now her turn. (9)

Kadzo's suffering mirrors the experience that the addicts undergo. This is a powerful indictment of drug abuse and a shocking reminder to young people entangled in this cruel web of drug abuse. As the action of the plot rises towards a climax, we witness a reformed Kadzo join hands with an equally reformed Kenga--her brother--and Inspector Korir in fighting this evil. Their benevolence however throws them into mortal danger since they are up against Mustapha Jillo alias Bigman alias Mono-eye; one of the most ruthless drug lords in the country. Mono-eye's callousness is exemplified by his henchmen's attack on Kadzo, Kenga and Inspector Korir at the "Marine Creek on River Kinango" (74). As they deck their motor boat they, "realized two of the men were holding what looked like machine-guns. Split seconds later, gunfire erupted across the water straight towards them....Bullets raked Safari Hatua's starboard outrigger, sending splinters into all directions" (75). The above encounter

symbolizes the danger and adversity that plagues the lives of contemporary youths who are up against seasoned drug lords or those who work for them just like Kadzo, Kenga and Issa.

Kadzo and Kenga's redemption is a lesson to the contemporary youths in Kenya; that positive behaviour change and recovery from drug-induced addiction is possible. Unlike Kadzo and Kenga, Some contemporary youths like in the case of Issa finds it very hard to change. That is why Inspector Korir observes that, although he had promised to change "It seemed that Issa was the only one of the trio who was unrepentant and continued to peddle drugs" (50). This observation reflects Issa's recklessness and unrepentant disposition. This is a hard to explain behaviour since the boy comes from an affluent family where his father is a well to do medical doctor and his mother a prominent lawyer.

Kadzo and Inspector Korir are determined to nub the drug lords against all adversities. Their battle against the drug lords reaches climax when Kadzo, Kenga and Inspector Korir are up against the drug cartel involving Mono-eye alias Big man, the police, government officials as well as some criminal elements in the army. This leads to a bitter clash with Mono-eye who however escapes in a private helicopter after setting the warehouse on fire with his workers inside. This callousness is brought to us through Inspector Korir's remarks that:

Anybody callous and cold-blooded enough to leave people to die in a burning warehouse would have no compunction about killing me. If I got in their way; not even Kadzo and Kenga would be spared. These people have killed before and would do it again!... . (122)

Later on however, their efforts yields fruits when Inspector Korir succeeds in arresting the drug lords as thus narrated:

In an hours' time, Big Man, his stevedores, Captain Andressano and his crew of six were put into the police launch. From the freighter, the detective recovered 2000 kilogrammes of cocaine, several satellite phones, four pistols and 200 bullets. Kadzo was glad that she had done her best to help Inspector Korir and his colleagues carryout this sting operation. They had planned for operation for three weeks as they awaited the past couple of days' huge consignments. (129)

The above episode marks momentary triumph for Inspector Korir, Kadzo and Kenga. However, in a twist of irony, Mono-eye and some, "members of his cartel escaped from police custody" (130), only after three days. This is very disheartening for Inspector Korir and the youths. Their painful effort is however rewarded when Kadzo: is "awarded the head of state commendation" (133) and a chance to read her essay on effects of drugs titled, "THE KENYA I DO NOT WANT TO LIVE IN" (133). Korir is also promoted to the rank of "Police Boss, Mombasa County" (139).

#### **4.4 Character and Characterization**

In *The Shark Attack* Gitaa has mainly focused on the effects of drugs in the society especially among the youths in contemporary Kenyan society. Her choice of characters and characterization is important in articulating her thematic concerns. Her mastery of prose fiction is clearly portrayed in the way she expertly collocates heroic characters as immortalized by Kadzo, Inspector Korir and Kenga against villains such as Mustapha Jillo alias Big man alias Mono-eye (124). Since literature is the mirror that reflects the dynamics

of the society, Gitaa's sense of reality is overwhelming; in the way she paints the two faces of the society; the good and the malevolent as depicted by her character–mosaic.

Kadzo

Kadzo is the protagonist and the heroine in Gitaa's, *The Shark Attack*. We are struck by her candour and valour when she tackles the shark head on. Her fight with the ravenous shark is thus described:

She got a grip of herself and thought: if a nine- year old girl on the Tana could fight for her life alone, why not me. She reached down with her right; lunging, plunging, squeezing and tearing at the shark with all her strength, she felt the shark's thick skin on the sloping forehead and further down the softer fold of skin around the eye. She dug in, clawing with her fingers again and again. Sooner than later, she felt the mighty jaws relax and release their grip. Kadzo saw the shark swim away from her. (8)

The episode described is a graphic illustration of the brutal fight between Kadzo and the shark. It is almost too fantastic but fascinating. It is a great lesson to the youths on valour and heroism. After witnessing such triumph on the part of Kadzo our admiration for her is boundless.

Her courage and heroism are further seen in her determination to turn a new leaf in her life. She is determined to change as she candidly tells Inspector Korir “So what do you want to know? I've already made up my mind to stop peddling and using drugs. They are the reason I'm here” (37). Her determination symbolizes some of the contemporary youths in Kenya



who are ready to change from vice to virtue. These are the youths involved in such vices as drugs, prostitution, robbery, truancy among others. It is a great lesson that change is possible.

Kadzo is also portrayed as intelligent and hardworking. In spite of her involvement in drug use and peddling, Kadzo is a brilliant student who gets straight As in school. She receives her results with consternation when Kenga; her brother informs her, “You’ve straight A’s in all your subjects? (55). As a self-assured student she has no qualms in accepting her results but in mathematics where she has some weakness as portrayed in her exclamation, “I got an A in Math!” (55). She cannot believe her eyes. Her performance is a portrayal of the contemporary youths who have achieved identity in spite of the obstacles that nature throws their way. This is seen in Kadzo’s case where poverty acts as a magnet that draws her to drug peddling as a way of generating some income.

Kadzo is also portrayed as an element of change in the contemporary society. As an ambassador of positive change among other contemporary youths hooked on the drug vice we witness her saying, “I am initiating a sort of rehabilitation centre where we shall counsel other teens and help them come out of the habit that almost saw me get killed” (54). As an agent of positive change in the society, Kadzo emerges as the paragon of hope and a role model to other youths in Kenya who are hooked on drugs.

Her essay titled, *THE KENYA I DO NOT WANT TO LIVE IN,*” (133) epitomizes Kadzo’s heroism. After helping Inspector Korir nab the drug kingpin, Mustapha Jillo alias Mono-eye, Kadzo becomes a self-appointed ambassador against drugs. Her essay read before the president is like a lesson book on drug use, peddling and their monstrous effects especially on contemporary youths in Kenya. Her efforts win her “the Head of State commendation among

other presidential awards” (133). She is now a hero and a role model to the other contemporary youths in Kenya.

#### Inspector Korir

He is a police inspector attached to the anti-narcotics unit in Mombasa. He has a specific assignment of unearthing and tackling a drug cartel led by Mustapha Jillo. This is a tough mission since the other officer-Sergeant Bilal- attached to this case was summarily eliminated by the notorious drug lord through police conspiracy (131). Inspector Korir is depicted as a conscientious man. His consciousness is portrayed in his moral candour where he rejects Mono-eye’s offer of riches. Offering to give him millions, Mono-eye tells him “Don’t be stupid like the other time. Let me go and all this will be yours. It’s only a couple of million shillings but there is more where this came from?” (127). His rejection of this sweet offer of millions in exchange for the drug lord’s freedom is a great shock to his juniors who are already salivating with greed at the prospect of quick riches. As a young man-one of the few among the elite squad in the police force-Korir is the epitome of morality among the contemporary youth in Kenya.

Inspector Korir’s sense of self-drive towards tackling the drug menace in Kenya is like an obsession. However, his overzealousness does not completely mask his sense of reality. He is aptly aware of the obstacles that plague his arduous assignment. This is true as:

Inspector Korir understood why it was said that ‘Kitu Kidogo’ had become a tradition in the force. Clean cops like him were fighting a losing battle. Magistrates who passed heavy sentences on drug barons and traffickers were transferred to hardships areas to wrestle with bandits and cattle rustlers, He made up his mind. He had to arrest this criminal there and then and ensure that

big man was not granted bail or bond as he would most likely abscond and leave the country. (128)

In spite of the cruel reality, the description depicts Inspector Korir as a determined young man who is prepared to tackle corruption even if it means paying for it with his life. As a conscientious young man Inspector Korir is a moral compass among the youths in contemporary Kenyan society who are sunk in corruption and sleaze.

As a heroic character, Inspector Korir is depicted as completely selfless and caring. His selflessness is thus described “Considering the conditions, he was driving recklessly and he knew it but he could not think about his own safety. Not when he had left Kadzo a sitting duck ...” (92). Inspector Korir is a rare character considering the way contemporary Kenyan society is riddled with selfishness and self-centeredness especially among the youths.

For his efforts, Inspector Korir is promoted to the rank of, “police Boss, Mombasa County” (139). At last we see his diligence and determination paying off. This is a great lesson to the youths in Kenya that one can lead a clean life and yet achieve success and his ultimate goals in life.

Kenga and Issa

These are among the minor characters in the novella as their role is not as elevated as that of Kadzo, Inspector Korir and Mono-eye.

Kenga is Kadzo’s younger brother. He is a teenage boy of African descent unlike Issa who is a Kenyan of Asian heritage. The two boys are complete antitheses of each other in terms of origin, social economic class and character.

Kenga hails from a poor socio-economic background since his father is a boats' repairman and his mother a housewife unlike Issa who is from upper-middle, for his father is a wealthy medical doctor as we come to realize through the dialogue he had with Dr. Otieno "Dr. Abdul, you are a wealthy man and I suggest that you book Issa into an exclusive clinic located near the foot of Mount Kenya" (16). From this description it is apparent that even the youths from a rich background can easily be lured into the web of drug addiction. It is an indication that youths from all socio-economic classes, religion, tribe and even race are in danger as a result of addiction to drugs.

Whereas Kenga is committed to complete behaviour change, Issa is a confused teenager who keeps flip flopping in his determination even after promising to quit the habit of drug use and peddling. This is a shocking observation for it seems that, "Issa was the only one of the trio who was unrepentant and continued to peddle drugs" (50). Issa's flip flopping character is typical of youths who have not achieved complete identity as described by psychoanalyst Erik Erickson. This is a great problem that affect many youths in contemporary Kenya.

Their point of convergence is however depicted in their love for their sisters. Kenga heartily loves his sister as seen during the aftermath of Kadzo's shark attack. Although he has not been physically hurt, Kenga does not think he would be able to bear the pain that Kadzo feels. When he visits her at the rehabilitation centre, he is horrified by her trembling and shaking that seems out of her control. He also realizes to his utter shock that "The sheets on the tinny cot were covered in human waste" (12). The description above is a portrayal of the fact that Kenga's psychological trauma is equally as painful as that of his sister's physical agony. This portrays the fact that not only does the drug abuse among the youths affects them but also their entire family and society by extension.

In comparison Issa is also portrayed as loving towards his sister – Jamila. This is the reason he can only confess to her about his drug addiction. He tells her “I’m fine, but things are really tough for me. I can’t seem to stop craving cocaine?” (83). These words show that Jamila is a source of strength and a moral fortress to despondent contemporary youths like Issa who are seen struggling hard to gain self-identity.

### Bigman alias Mono-Eye

His real name is Mustapha Jillo. He is nicknamed Bigman since he is the senior most drug kingpin who is served by a complicated syndicate that includes: his ruthless henchmen, the colluding government officials, some corrupt police officers and some misfits in the army. He is also nicknamed Mono-eye since he has only one eye after he was involved in an accident resulting in loss of eye.

Mono-eye is depicted as a cruel drug kingpin who means business at whatever cost. When Kadzo, Kenga and Issa decline to continue with his business of drug trafficking, Big man has no qualms eliminating them. When he gives signal to his henchmen to eliminate the trio, Kadzo immediately knows what is coming for, “they had seen this gesture before and someone’s life had been snuffed out” (1). Her fears are confirmed when one of the “burly stevedores lunged at (her) and grabbed her t-shirt front which she had put over her swimsuit” (1). As described, the trio is on the verge of death only to be saved by an explosion that sends everybody tumbling into the ocean. In this case the writer uses Mono-eye as an example of monstrous adults who misuse the youth who they either dump or eliminate afterwards.

The height of Mono-eye's callousness is seen when he burns the drugs warehouse with all his workers inside. This incidence is described thus:

He clicked his tongue, and ran towards a stairway that led to the fire escape but first, he had to do some cleaning. He poured a jerry can of petrol which was always hidden in a comer, onto the floor of the warehouse and struck a match stick. He then rushed and climbed the staircase to the roof of the ware house. A helicopter was parked on a helipad at the centre of the roof. (121)

This is the height of callousness. The episode described above portrays Mono-eye as completely inhuman, bloody and callous. He is the embodiment of evil in the society. His character is a shocking warning to the youths that all that glitters is not gold. For behind the façade of generosity--for Mono-eye was generous to a fault (132)--lies a wretched, cold-blooded – callous heart.

#### **4.5 Stylistic Devices Used in the Story**

##### **4.5.1 Description**

In *The Shark Attack* Gitaa has widely used description in narrating the monstrosity of drugs in Kenya especially among the contemporary youths as embodied through the characters of Kadzo, Kenga and Issa.

Drugs are a real monster in Kenyan society as illustrated by the suffering that Kadzo undergoes. It is due to drugs that Kadzo suffers the shark attack after the mother ship is bombed in the drug imbroglio. As if this is not enough, her right leg is amputated from the

knee (8). Apart from this, she suffers withdrawal symptoms which completely mask her physical suffering. All this is told through description:

The healing stump that was all that had remained of her left leg started to ache, the pain mixing mercilessly with tremors in her nerves. The throbbing pain made her reach for the bell on the headboard frantically. She wanted to call the nurse for a painkiller. Unfortunately, she underestimated the distance between herself and the bell. Alas! She fell off the bed and landed on the cold tiled floor with a thump and jarring pain. (9)

Since Kadzo is the embodiment of other Kenyan youths involved in drug use, her pain is a reflection of the tribulations that bedevil other youths who are hooked on drugs and peddling her suffering is a shocking rebuke against the menace.

The shark attack did not affect Kadzo only. Her brother Kenga and his friend Issa were equally affected albeit emotionally. Their emotional suffering as a result of this encounter is brought to us through description thus:

Kenga sat outside their house in the old town near Fort Jesus on an old overturned dhow. He was in a trance-like state. He was engrossed in the thoughts about the day he had almost lost his sister in the shark attack. It had been horrific. The thought of how the shark had almost caught him and how it had managed to get his poor sister caused his heart to beat faster. He and Issa had watched from the beach in shock and disbelief as Kadzo fought frantically between life and death. The highness of the cocaine they had snorted earlier on had worn off because of shock. (26)

This description reveals the effects of drug abuse are not confined to the victims only; but their reverberating effects have a way of spreading to close relatives as well as friends.

Kaizo, Kenga and Issa's mastery of the intricacies of drug trafficking is admirable. This is explained through Kadzo's description as she narrates their escapades to Inspector Korir. She tells Korir:

We knew every nook and cranny of the waters to the extent that we could not hit barrier reefs even if we sailed with our eyes closed. We would drop the cargo at points along River Galana, Kinango, Malindi, Kilifi, Mtwapa, Fomosa bay, Kipini, Lamu, Patta Island and Chambone among others. (40)

The description above is a powerful illustration of the teen's expertise, which is contrary to our expectation due to their tender age. It also serves to show the difference between the parents' perception of their children and the reality. To their parents the trio is an innocent bunch of teenagers with no knowledge and expertise in drug peddling when in reality they are the real connoisseurs of drugs. This serves to show the dichotomy between parents' understanding of their children and the reality.

The societal abhorrence of drugs is demonstrated when some benevolent residents of Mombasa organizes public demonstrations against this evil. This is brought to us through description:

A day later, the streets of Mombasa were filled with the young and old. Kadzo and some community members had organized a peaceful demonstration against drug abuse and trafficking. They marched through the Old Town and ended up at the main police post where they were addressed by the anti-narcotics police boss. (67)



The demonstrators in Mombasa are symbolic of societal consciousness against the menace of drugs. These are men and women of good conscience who have not been tainted by the menace. They are the souls ready to salvage the youth who are in mortal danger of being annihilated by the monster of drugs.

Most of the youths in Kenya indulge in drugs due to neglect by parents and family. A family is the basic unity in all the societies of the world. Unlike in the olden days, contemporary parents have no time for their children as exemplified by Issa's family. This is brought out through description where we are told that:

Their doctor father came home quite late in the night and left at the crack of dawn. Their mother was so busy in her law firm. She rarely found time for the family. They could go for days without seeing one another. The children never had time to sit down with their parents to talk. (82)

The description above is a powerful indictment of individuals who have abdicated their parental roles at the altar of vocational commitment and avaricious pursuit of material wealth at the expense of their children's welfare. This is ironical since most of these parents are in pursuit of their ambitions in order to fend for their children but instead end up destroying the same.

Mono-eye (124), is the epitome of evil in Gitaa's *The Shark Attack*. Like most drug barons, he is a flashy character exuding affluence due to dirty money he gets from drugs. Inspector Korir describes his aura thus:

The bling glinting from Big Man's neck and fingers was enough to make one go blind, short and well built, he was in his usual colorful shirts and shorts which hung several inches below his bonny knees as if they were made for

someone else. Big man opened a briefcase full of crisp new one thousand shilling notes. He picked up a bundle and waved it under Korir's nose. (127)

This description, paints Mono-eye as a boisterous character whose philosophy in life is embedded in avarice for material wealth. By waving money to Inspector Korir, he comes out as the epitome of corruption in the society as depicted in Gitaa's, *The Shark Attack*. He has no qualms misusing other people and then eliminating them. These are especially the youth such as Kadzo Kenga and Issa. From this description and elsewhere Mustapha Jillo is a complete anti-hero and the arch-villain in Gitaa's *The Shark Attack*.

Mono-eye's character contrasts sharply with that of Inspector Korir. Whereas the former is a real arch-villain, the latter is a super-hero who is rewarded by being promoted to the rank of a police boss. The reward for his heroism is brought to us through description thus:

Perched precariously in his upgraded seat in front of the Police Buffalo aeroplane, Korir who had just left the party was having an overhead tour of his new jurisdiction. Korir had recently been promoted to police Boss, Mombasa County. He stared out of his window at the panoramic view of the coastal archipelago below. He was seated with the pilot near the cockpit. (139)

Inspector Korir's elevation to the position of the county commander of police at a youthful age, for he "was not yet thirty years old" (32) is a juicy reminder to the contemporary youths that hard work, discipline and diligence pay. This is contrary to the contemporary Kenyan society where such virtues are viewed with utter disdain especially among the youth who are in hot pursuit of quick riches and instant fame.

#### **4.5.2 Dialogue**

Gitaa has extensively used dialogue to show the effects of drugs especially among the youths. Gitaa portrays Kadzo as an agent of change among the youth in Kenya. A drug addict herself, Kadzo is an inspiration to the youth since she is ready to change as portrayed through the dialogue between Dr. Otieno and her brother Kenga. Dr. Otieno tells Kenga “Kenga, your sister has decided to be clean and that is why she is determined to complete the process” (13). This dialogue is an indication of Kadzo’s determination towards complete rehabilitation of herself. She is ready to start a new life as a reformed youth.

Dr. Abdul’s realization of his irresponsible parenthood is brought to us through dialogue. As a way of confessing his shortcomings, he tells Dr. Otieno:

I now realize that some of us parents are to blame; we give our children more than they need although we have no time to supervise them and to show them how they should spend what we give them. I regret that’s how they end up in drugs. (17)

The above dialogue is true when looked through the prism of Dr. Abdul’s family life. This because Abdul is an affluent medical doctor who is so committed to his professional calling at the expense of his fatherly responsibility. He has no time for his teenage son, Issa, the reason he turns out to be a truant. He is an example of parents who have totally abdicated their parental responsibility leading to social and moral destruction of their children. This aspect of parental negligence is one of the upheavals that plague the youth in Kenya today.

Many parents whose children take drugs do not like owning up the blame. Instead they go into a process of denial where they create scapegoats through which they project their guilt. This is depicted in the blame game between Dr. Abdul and Mr. Karisa's family, where Dr. Abdul projects his blame on Mr. Karisa's children, Kadzo and Kenga. He reprimands Mr. and Mrs. Karisa thus, "You! I should have known your children will be involved in this, vot on earth have they gotten my son into this time? (20). His utterance is typical of the contemporary parents who have abdicated their parental roles. These are the kind of parents who are seen projecting their anger and weakness on others when their children like many youths go astray.

Drug abuse has adverse effects on the youths' achievement in education as well as other goals and aspirations in life as depicted in the dialogue that ensues between Dr. Abdul and his son Issa. Dr. Abdul admonishes his son "How could you Issa? Vat on earth were you thinking? ... is this your way of aiming for your medical degree?" (23). The above conversation portrays Dr. Issa as a clueless man who is out of sync with the current reality. The utterance portrays him as completely clueless about his son's life, goals and aspirations. Since he is a medical doctor he thinks that his son would automatically follow the suit. This portrays him as the kind of parent who thinks that his son will automatically achieve his goals without parental input.

On the surface, Kadzo Kenga and Issa appear innocent just like many other youths. Behind the façade however, lie hardened drug users as brought out through dialogue. Issa confesses that when he talked to Kadzo and Kenga he "discovered that they were way ahead. They were not only using the drug but peddling them. They brought some valium and D-5 for me. Soon I was into mandrax. Soon than later, I realised that mandrax too wans't enough for me"

(24). Soon he graduated to cocaine and heroin. Issa's confession helps unmask the dichotomy between parental perception of their children and the crude reality that informs their lives. This is a rude awakening to the parents that their children could be seasoned drug users behind the façade of innocence.

Kadzo and Inspector Korir's fight against drugs has thrown them from fire into a kiln as depicted through the dialogue between Mono-eye and his henchmen. Big man alias Mono-eye inquires "Did you manage to warn that snooping inspector and the now crippled girl... If this inspector insists on investigating our operations, he'll end up just like his buddy?" (60). This is an open threat that come to pass when Kadzo is attacked and almost thrown into Indian Ocean. Inspector Korir is also attacked in a stage –managed car accident. It is only through sheer luck that they are able to survive the ordeal. This is a great lesson to the contemporary youths that criminals can kill without batting an eye-lid when their interest is threatened.

The effect of drugs is brought to us through dialogue. Dr. Abdul outlines them in his conversation with the youth at one of the public Barazas organized by Kadzo as "Excessive sweating, tremors, vomiting, anxiety, insomnia, diarrhoea and muscle pain can cause death" (107). Dr. Abdul further outlines other signs that indicate that somebody is using drugs as, "forgetfulness, aggressiveness and irritability, feeling rundown, hopelessness, depression and suicidal threats, selfishness, personal neglect to hygiene, use of air fresheners and incense in their rooms. (107). The description above is a poignant portrayal of drugs menace and an indictment against drug abuse.

Gitaa paints the whole government machinery as involved in the facilitating trafficking in drugs. Due to the astronomical amount of money involved in drug trafficking, the kingpins

and cartels have succeed in spreading their tentacles and capturing the army, government officials and even the police as seen in the bitter exchange between Inspector Korir and his boss. Inspector Korir's candour is portrayed where he faces his boss head-on by telling him:

Yes, sir. I have. Big man kept it well-documented and verbal testimonies by witnesses that show that offers of cash were made to you Sir, are available on record. We also have CCTV footage of you receiving payments in our possession.  
(131)

The conversation above is an indication that Inspector Korir's boss is one of the officers involved in drug syndicate. Inspector Korir's valour is a great tribute to contemporary youth who are virtuous enough to confront the monster of drugs head-on. That is why he is promoted to the hallowed position of a county boss at a tender age.

Dialogue is important in Moraa's *The Shark Attack* since it helps the readers delve into the minds of the characters in order to understand their fears, aspirations, intentions and struggles as they tackle the issue drug menace in the text. As the characters communicate their intentions and struggles, they end up revealing their character roles where characters such as Kadzo, Kenga and Inspector Korir are depicted as heroes on one hand and Mono-eye and henchmen as villains on the other.

#### **4.5.3 Code-Switching**

In literature, code-switching is a literary style that involves the use of elements from more than one language. Gitaa has profoundly used Kiswahili in *The Shark Attack*, to explore the effects of drug menace in contemporary Kenyan society especially among the youths.

Contextually, Kiswahili is one of the major languages in Kenya since it is one of the two official languages, besides English; as well as the national language. Kabui's use of Kiswahili

elements in her book is a form of code-switching since the main text of *The Shark Attack* is primarily written in English. Its use in the text is an indication of originality and authenticity in the way it grounds the book in terms of geographical setting since it is the major language that is mainly spoken in Mombasa.

During the horrendous incidence of the shark attack, Issa is so shocked that he shouts hysterically “Papa! Papa!” (5). Papa is the Kiswahili word for shark. Here he is warning Kadzo of the impending danger which portrays him as caring towards other youngsters. On deciphering the message, kadzo’s distress is captured in her frantic response “Yaa Alla!” (5). The above are Arabic words referring to God, the Most High, the Most Merciful. The above utterance portrays Kadzo as religious. It is also an indication of religious diversity in Kenya and a tacit lesson to the contemporary youths on the issue of diversity and religious tolerance.

Kadzo’s mother blames Dr. Abdul for abdication of his parental role and for spoiling his son with money. She tells him in Kiswahili:

Nyamazeni nyinyi nyote... Wewe wampatia mtoto gari na maelfu ya pesa. Sisi ndio maskini na huyo mtoto wenu ndiye anayewaharibu wanangu, Kadzo na Kenga. Sasa mwanangu Kadzo hana mguu. Yuafanyiwa opresheni, hata anaweza akaaga dunia... (21)

#### English Translation

(Keep quite all of you... You (Dr. Abdul) spoil your child by giving him a car and huge amount of money which he uses to destroy my poor children Kadzo and Kenga. Look at how Kadzo now lost her leg. She is undergoing an operation which might even result to her death.)

Mrs. Karisa's use of Kiswahili is a tacit reflection of her socio-economic class and education background. It also contributes to the authenticity in the text since Mr. and Mrs. Karisa are hoi-polloi who do not pretend to be elitist. Her stern remarks are a rejoinder to Dr. Abdul's blame where he thinks that Kadzo and Kenga are the cause of his son's delinquency. Trading blames is typical of contemporary parents when their youthful children go astray.

Drug trafficking is a risky affair that calls for coded language as a means of communication as seen in the conversation between Kadzo and the young Zombie like trafficker. Requesting for drugs, Kadzo addresses the young man in Swahili slang, "Leo haunipambi?"(65). English Translation (would you sell me some drugs?) In response to Kadzo's question the young man shakes his head and walks away. Kadzo's guess is that the young man perhaps fears Inspector Korir who cannot easily camouflage his profession due to his mode of dressing and posture. The above behaviour portrays some of the contemporary youths involved in drugs as expert cheats and professional at the chess game of camouflage hence the young man's evasiveness.

During public demonstration against drugs, most of the speakers address their grievances in Kiswahili for instance, one of the speakers says:

Sisi tumechoka Bwana! Watoto wetu wamekuwa waizi kwa sababu hawana pesa za kununua unga. Unga kama ukucha ni shilingi mia mbili. Wasichana wamekuwa Malaya na wavulana mashoga ili tu wapate ndong'a. (70)

English Translation

(We are tired man! Our children have become thieves since require colossal amount of money to buy to buy drugs which are too expensive. Both boys and girls are prostituting themselves to get money with which they can buy drugs)



It also contributes to the originality in the text since Kiswahili is the local language spoken in the port city of Mombasa. The use of Kiswahili without its translated equivalent is, however, an authorial oversight since it might end up alienating non-Kiswahili readers.

#### **4.5.4 Embedding**

In *The Shark Attack*, Gitaa's creative ingenuity is seen in the way she has uses embedded elements to narrate her story. Barry defines the act of embedding as a situation where “writers make use of ‘frame narratives’ (also called ‘primary narratives’), which contain within them ‘embedded narratives’ (also called ‘secondary narratives’)” (154). In *The Shark Attack* embedded narratives occur in form of elements which include: newspaper reports, short text messages (sms), prepared speeches as well as the use of an essay.

To start with, Gitaa uses newspaper reports to corroborate her narration on the issue of drug menace among Kenyan youths. The explosion of the mother ship and the subsequent attack by a shark on Kadzo is reported in the newspaper thus:

Freighter valued at 100 million destroyed in mysterious blast. The ship, belonging to an Italian investor, caught fire at Shimoni Creek in Kwale county. On being contacted, the owner said that the ship drifted from where it was anchored while they were in the deep-sea fishing and hit an electric cable at Club Marine before exploding into a huge fireball. (47-48)

This newspaper report is completely distorted since it alleges accidental fire instead of intentional burst that serves to mask criminal activities by Mono-eye and his drug cartel. This is a shock to Inspector Korir and a portrayal of the notoriety that characterizes the heinous trade in drugs and narcotics.

Furthermore, Gitaa uses mobile phone short text messages (sms) as a tool of narration in her text. After feeling threatened by the young heroine (Kadzo), Bigman is seen sending her a threatening short text message:

You will soon be out of this world; you and your brother. Crippled girl walking- your cop friend won't help you coz he will also be dead like his nosy partner. Keep your meddling long nose out of all drugs and anti-narcotics cases. This is your ticket and your family's to hell. This could be your final day-you are a dead girl limping to your death! (81)

The above phone message is not an empty threat from a callous drug lord. He is serious and could kill the trio without batting an eye-lid for interfering with his drug business. This is a poignant lesson to the youth on the dangers of drug trafficking.

In addition, Gitaa uses prepared speeches to drive her message home. During the public baraza organized by Kadzo with the support of the area chief (104) the young man invited as the key speaker narrates his estrangement from his family as a result of his extravagant drug habits. Consequently, the young man is disowned by his family. His speech is an eye opening lesson to youths in Kenya on the effects of drugs and the stress they visit on families.

Gitaa uses the essay form to narrate her story. The writer assigns the role of writing and reading the essay to Kadzo, the protagonist and heroine in her book. Kadzo's award-winning essay, whose title is "THE KENYA I DO NOT WANT TO LIVE IN", is read before the President of the country during the Head of State Commendation and award ceremony. During this occasion Kadzo's status is elevated to a hallowed pedestal of excellence as a result of her success and heroism.

Kadzo's essay highlights her life as a notorious drug user and peddler. It also serves to explain the type of drugs peddled in Kenya, their origin, their mode of transportation and their debilitating socio-economic effects especially among the youths. Kadzo succeeds in outlining the drug cartels in the country which include: henchmen employed by drug lords, the corrupt police officers, sleazy officers in the government and other corridors of power such as politics as well as the army. This is evident from the way it causes jitters among the dignitaries invited to this presidential ceremony. This is an indication of their guilt.

As tools of narration, embedded elements are important in the way they aid in reinforcing the subject matter communicated in the major plot. This is the reason why Emmanuel Obiechina in "Narrative Proverbs in the African Novel" equates them to proverbs since their function in communicating the subject matter is the same. In this respect, Obiechina asserts that:

Like the use of proverbs proper, the embedding of stories in the novels is based upon two main principles of the African oral tradition- authority and association through which an idea is given validity by being placed side by side with another idea that bears the stamp of communal approval and by it being linked to the storehouse of wisdom. (201)

Borrowing from Obiechina's observation we can say that Moraa is able to communicate the theme of drug menace among the youth more powerfully than if she had only used the primary narrative to communicate the subject matter. The act of embedding is also important as an aesthetic tool of narration since it makes the story more interesting by breaking the monotony of narration. In this way readers are able to solve the subject matter more easily.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Moraa's *The Shark Attack* is set in the Kenyan coastal city of Mombasa. It is an award winning novella published in 2014 hence the issues tackled are a reflection of the situation in contemporary Kenyan society. Gitaa settles on teenagers: Kadzo Kenga and Issa as the major characters to narrate themes in the text. The other character; Inspector Korir is also a young man since he is not yet thirty years old hence the problems they encounter are a reflection of the upheavals that plague the youth in contemporary Kenyan society.

More so, the characterization in the novella is impressive in the way the writer collocates heroic characters such as Kadzo, Kenga and Inspector Korir on one side against villains such as Mono-eye and his drug cartel on the other side to reveal the effects of drugs among the youth in contemporary Kenyan society.

In terms of style, Gitaa has used a straight forward plot punctuated with embedded elements such as newspaper reports, short text messages (sms), prepared speeches as well as the use of an essay. Apart from these, she has also used other aspects of style such as description, the use of code-switching and dialogue to narrate the effects of drugs among the youth in contemporary Kenyan society.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The study has examined literary works by three Kenyan writers and their contribution to the development and growth of literary discourse in the country. The works studied include: Elizabeth Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, Anthony Mugo's *Ask the Stars* and Moraa Gitaa's *The Shark Attack*.

The study was interested in the analysis of form in an endeavour to expose the issues that affect the youth in contemporary Kenyan society. To achieve this goal the study employed Russian formalism and the theory of narratology. During literary analysis, the study recognized the distinctive formalistic nature of various genres of prose fiction, oral forms as well as the verse in literature. Aware of these differences, the study analyzed form in the three novellas using analytical aspects that characterize prose fiction such as the development of plot, characterization, stylistic devices used in the story as well as the narrative perspective to bring out the thematic concerns tackled in the three selected texts.

The contemporary issues tackled in this research project includes: the identity crisis among the youth in Elizabeth Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, the quest for unity in Anthony Mugo's *Ask the Stars* and the effects of drug abuse among the youth in Moraa Gitaa's *The Shark Attack*. By studying the above issues we are able to understand the plight of the youth in the contemporary Kenyan society.

Furthermore, the study takes note of the character mosaic which involves the collocation of young characters vis-à-vis the adults to show the dichotomy between teenage and adult perspective. It also makes us understand the contrast between the world of the youth and that of the adults.

Critical analysis of the style in the three selected texts has reveals the artistic idiosyncrasies and vision of the three selected writers. In *Was Nyakeeru my Father?*, Kabui employs description, dialogue, rhetorical questions and imagery to narrate the theme of identity crisis among the youth. On his part, Anthony Mugo has used proverbs, imagery, flashback and description to explore the quest for unity in *Ask the Stars*. In the same vein, Gitaa has used description, dialogue, use of foreign language and the art of embedding to bring to the fore the effects of drugs among the youth in contemporary Kenyan society in *The Shark Attack*. The employment of similar stylistic devices such as description and imagery is a portrayal of convergence in artistic vision and a loud proclamation of the universality of literature. The use of different stylistic aspects such as rhetorical questions, flash back, code-switching and the art of embedding attests to the writers' divergence in terms of artistic idiosyncrasies.

One of the major findings of this study is that there is a shortage of supplementary reading materials such as novels for young adults especially in upper primary and secondary school levels. Scholars and other leaders in the education sector should come up with awards similar to the Burt Award to encourage the authorship and publication of such texts. More so, mainstream publishers as well as other institutions such as the universities should encourage the publication of such texts in an endeavour to tap and nurture creative talents especially among the emerging writers in Kenya.

The study has not exhaustively tackled all the contemporary issues that affect the youth in the twenty first century since its main focus was the study of form and how it helps in the exposition of the identity crisis among the youth, quest for unity and the effects of drug abuse among the youth. In view of this, the study therefore recommends further research in this field to come up with more issues that affect the youth in the world of today.

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