

**YOUNG ADULTS' LITERATURE AS A TOOL OF CHANGE IN THE  
LIVES OF YOUNG KENYANS: A CASE STUDY OF *NEVER SAY  
NEVER* BY ANTHONY MUGO AND *THE DELEGATE* BY EDWARD  
MWANGI.**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

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

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This research project has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how two writers, Anthony Mugo in *Never Say Never* and Edward Mwangi in *The Delegate* have presented the challenges of young adults in the contemporary Kenyan society. Through use of characters that the young adults can identify with, the two novels have provided the young adults with role models that can greatly impact on the youth. The idea that literature can be used to boost self understanding is not a new one. Probst, R in *Response Analysis: Teaching Literature in Junior and Senior High School* (1988) notes that in the process of reading literature, some readers' concepts of the world are re-affirmed, modified, or even refuted and this can result in changing a reader. This reading of the text can be a process of self-creation where in searching for a response to the text, in responding and in finding errors; the reader gains a greater sense of self. This study compares the protagonists in the novels and also seeks to identify the potential in the books to impact on the youth in Kenya. This is based on the premise that an individual can be changed by what one reads. The study will be limited to a close textual reading of the two novels and library research. The study will rely on carefully selected set of theoretical frameworks and methodology. The study draws from sociological literary theory and formalism as a guide in carrying out a research across the five chapters. The first has the introduction, chapter two and three deals with the male and female protagonist as a role model respectively, chapter four makes a comparative study of the two texts and chapter five is the conclusion. Young adulthood is often a tumultuous time in a person's life. The study suggests that engagement with honest character portrayals in young adult literature can provide an understanding of their very real situations. The young adults can therefore learn a lot from this kind of literature and can use it as a tool of change in their lives.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.**

#### **1.1 Introduction.**

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

These were the words used by the Dutch scholar of Ethiopian letters, Reidulf, K. Molvaer, in 1997 to make a pronouncement on what he believed is the truth about literature in general and literature produced in the Eastern Africa in particular. He came to this conclusion after several years of studying major writers of one of the national traditions from this sub region of Africa, namely Ethiopian literature written in Amharic. The observation couched in the citation above appears at the outset of his study, *Black Lions: The Creative Lives of Modern Ethiopia’s Literary Giants and Pioneers* (1997). His reference to literature excludes the oral traditions which are even older across the whole continent and the sub-region too. It is with this definition of literature as written texts and with its social relevance articulated by Molvaer above that we pay our attention in this study to what we consider to be examples of good young adults’ literature from Kenya.

Literature being a mirror of the society can impact greatly on its readers. Young Kenyan adults face many challenges. Many struggle in one way or another for survival in environments that militate against them. Appalling pictures of deteriorating morality, senseless violence, widespread poverty, rampant teenage pregnancy and drug abuse among



the youth in Kenyan families are what we see on a daily basis. Though it seems that we have reached a dead end, there is a feeling that the young adults' literature can be used as a tool to help the youth acquire skills and knowledge they require to forge ahead and overcome challenges in this society.

The contemporary young adults' literature treats contemporary problems in ways that reflect the concerns of young adults as they struggle on how to become adults in a complex society. This kind of literature can be used to foster in the young adults a sense of responsibility for their actions and feelings. This is a resource that can be enlisted to save young adults in Kenya, and it is virtually an untapped commodity. This literature can provide young adults with a means for transcending the problems they encounter as they grow up, it can lead them to a healthy self-discovery, and can help them eliminate whatever sense of isolation or alienation they may be threatened with. It can also help them overcome entrenched personal problems. The nation's libraries and schools have a great responsibility to see to it that this literature gets into the hands of the people who need it the most. This is corroborated by the words of Brooks et al ;( 1982).

“Literature plays the role of strengthening the formation of values and feelings of solidarity, equity and firmly establishes the qualities of tolerance, compassion, sharing, caring, civil responsibility and ability to resolve conflicts through non-violent means and critical acumen,” (306).

Young adults' books are one tool among others in achieving this goal. When they equip the youth with the said values, there is a possibility that the young adults will become more critical and change their outlook on life.

The idea that literature can be used to boost self understanding is not a new one. Probst, R in *Response Analysis: Teaching Literature in Junior and Senior High School* (1988) notes that in the process of reading literature, some readers' concepts of the world are re-affirmed, modified, or even refuted and this can result in changing a reader. This reading of the text can be a process of self-creation where in searching for a response to the text, in responding and in finding errors; the reader gains a greater sense of self. Here, the atmosphere, suitability of the literature, reader receptivity and textual reliability are crucial to the process described.

This issue is further explained by Roseblatt, .L. in *Literature as Exploration* (1989) in that he describes reading of literature as an intensely personal experience which can help develop in the reader habits of critical thought, heightened sensitivity to others and a more fully articulated set of values and principles.

Fredrick Douglas, the black abolitionist confesses in *The Narratives of the Life of Fredrick Douglas* (1994) to having been changed by a book. He always desired to learn how to read so as to acquire the knowledge contained in books. This is what created for him a pathway from slavery to freedom. He states,

I was now about twelve years old and the thought of being a slave for life began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time I got hold of a book entitled *The Columbian Orator*. Every opportunity I got I used to read the book. In the same book, I met with one Sheridan's mighty speeches on and in[sic] behalf of Catholic emancipation. These were choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts,[sic] of my own soul that frequently flashed through my mind and died away from want of utterances. The reading of those documents

enabled me to utter my thoughts and to meet arguments brought forward to sustain slavery (Chapman 240-241).

While Frederick Douglass was able to transform himself from the status of a slave to that of a free man through books, Malcolm X transformed himself from hoodlum to revolutionary. Books allowed him to become, by turns, first Malcolm Little, then Malcolm X, and finally El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. He writes this of himself in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965):

I suppose it was inevitable that as my word-base broadened, I could for the first time pick up a book and read and now begin to understand what the book was saying. Anyone who has read a great deal can imagine the new world that opened. Let me tell you something: from then until I left that prison, in every free moment I had, if I was not reading in the library, I was reading in my bunk. You couldn't have gotten me out of books with a wedge ....In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life. (172-73).

Could not these same kinds of transformations take place in young Kenyan adults today? Books-the right books- at the right time will spur their growth as human beings and enable them to have a different outlook on life. The books provided will enable them realize that there are others the world over who encounter what they have encountered.

### **Definition of young adults' literature**

According to Nielsen and Donelson, young adult literature is anything that readers between the approximate ages of twelve and eighteen choose to read either for leisure or for school assignments. A young adult therefore, is someone between the age of twelve and the age of

eighteen. Authors and readers of young adult (YA) novels often define the genre as literature traditionally written for ages ranging from twelve years up to the age of eighteen, while some publishers may market young adult literature to as low as age ten and as high as age twenty-five.

Themes and styles in young adults' literature are often subordinated to the more tangible elements of plot, setting, and character, which appeal more readily to younger readers. The vast majority of YA stories portray an adolescent, rather than an adult or child as the central character. The subject matter and story lines of YA literature are typically consistent with the age and experience of the main character. Themes in YA stories often focus on the challenges of youth. A young adult "story has to be told from a consistent point of view" (Nilsen & Donelson, 1993, 77). The consistent point of view is that of a young adult who tells of the experiences of the youths.

Some researchers have attempted to describe this genre. From the perspective of reading interest, Reid (1999) regards young adult literature as "books that adolescents would probably like and be able to relate to" (3). Similarly, Wilder and Teasley (2000) suggest that young adult literature includes books written intentionally for young adults as the audience, any books that young adults like to read, and publications that publishers market to young adult readers.

However, these descriptive definitions highlight the social context of young adult literature without resulting in a better understanding of the literary qualities of young adult literature. Certain literary properties of young adult literature are reflected in the following definitions. Brown and Stephens (1995) define young adult literature as a text that "focuses upon

youthful characters and explores their sense of identity, their adventures, their dreams, and their trials” (6). In a similar vein, Wilder and Teasley (2000) contend that young adult literature “deals with issues that young people face . . . or issues that young people are afraid they may have to face” ( 55).

Other researchers have identified young adult literature from the perspective of writing craft. Regarding style, Hertz and Gallo (1996) mention the quick-paced style in young adult texts, where “the first page or two demand readers’ attention, enticing them to read on” (xvi). With respect to characterization, Reid (1999) observes that “the teenage main character is usually perceptive, sensitive, intelligent, mature, and independent” and “the actions and decisions of the main characters are major factors in the outcome of the conflict” (4). Bushman and Haas (2002) identify some “common characteristics” of young adult literature: “Conflicts are often consistent with the young adult’s experience, themes are often of interest to young people, protagonists and most characters are young adults, and the language parallels that of young people” (2). In other words, there is a lot of suspense in young adults literature especially in the first few pages which helps in creating interest in the reader. The main character does a lot in controlling the flow of the story while the language used is one that the young adults can understand.

The above statements provide insight into the distinguishing features of young adult literature, even though they are partial, not comprehensive. Nilsen and Donelson (2001) offer a more inclusive list of characteristics of young adult literature:

“Young adult authors write from the viewpoint of young people.” Young adults’ books are written through the eyes of adolescents. “Please, Mother, I want the credit.” In young adults’

stories, the protagonists get rid of their parents or an elder to accomplish their own goals. “Young adult literature is fast-paced.” Young adults’ novels have plots that develop speedily through a restricted number of events and characters. “Young adult literature includes a variety of genres and subjects.” Young adults’ books are abundant in a remarkable diversity of subjects, themes, and genres. “The body of work includes stories about characters from many different ethnic and cultural groups.” Young adult literature reflects social, economic, and ethnic multiplicity. “Young adult books are basically optimistic, with characters making accomplishments.” Young adults’ works inspire adolescent readers by showing them how to successfully mature from childhood to adulthood, even in the face of cruel realities. “Successful young adult novels deal with emotions that are important to young adults.” Young adults’ fiction addresses issues of physical growth and mental maturity in adolescents’ developmental tasks. (. 25-33).

This study aims at carrying out a comparative study of two novels: Anthony Mugo’s *Never Say Never* and Edward Mwangi’s *The Delegate*. I understand that the two authors have written novels which, if well read by young adults, can impact immensely on them. This is because the two novels highlight the challenges of young adults in the contemporary Kenyan society, and through choice of characters that the young adults can associate with and themes that appeal to them, the authors are able to pass their message to the readers. Mugo won the 2012 Burt Award Kenyan chapter. He confessed to having written for the past 20 years but had never had any of his manuscripts published. This was not the first time he had won, for his short stories *Too Innocent to Die* and *Not a Drop* had won the National Book Development Council of Kenya (NBDCK) Prize for Budding Writers in 2009 and 2010 respectively.

*Never say Never* is a story of Muthini Njoki a boy who struggles against all odds to get educated. The author probably uses the name Muthini to reflect the abject poverty the protagonist had to endure. Njoki was his mother's name which earned him a lot of ridicule from his peers and kept wishing that he could use his father's name. His parents had separated when he was a young boy. His story portrays the challenges young adults encounter when being raised by single mothers. He moves from one approved school to another, and at long last he qualifies to join the university.

The title of the book is got from the words of the protagonist's mother when she goes to visit him at Kericho Approved School. She says to him "I always wanted you to get an education. I couldn't afford it, though .All you have to do is fight like a wounded lion and never say never" (39).These words are what kept the protagonist going till he attained his goal.

Mwangi's *The Delegate* came second in the said 2012 Burt Award Kenyan chapter. The protagonist in this novel is Chebet who has to choose between some cultural practices and getting education. She opts for the latter and runs away from home after the death of her mother. Hers is a life full of tribulations but her strong will and perseverance see her through.

### **1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The study looks at ways in which young adults' literature can be used to mould the readers by providing them with role models who can ennoble them. Young adults' literature addresses issues of peer pressure, poverty, sexuality, loss of parents and other challenges that young adults encounter as they are growing up. These are pertinent societal issues yet little has been done in the scholarly field to look at the value the books that are ever flooding in the Kenyan market can have on the young adults. The young adults in Kenya are attempting to

transcend the social evils that bedevil them and it can lead them to self- discovery. This study aims at illustrating that young adults' literature can help the youth overcome entrenched personal problems through providing them with role models who have had similar encounters. Through a comparative study of Anthony Mugo's *Never Say Never* and Edward Mwangi's *The Delegate*, the study investigates the depiction of the challenges the young adults encounter and how they go about them with a hope of showing that when the books are read by the target audience, they can change their attitude about life.

## **1.2 JUSTIFICATION FOR MY STUDY**

This study is important because critics of African literature have shunned studying young adults' literature despite the many books that have flooded the markets. The value this kind of literature has on the Kenyan youth has been overlooked.

This study seeks to explore how Mugo has presented issues affecting the boy child in the Kenyan society and how he has been able to use his protagonist to bring out his vision and philosophy on the society he lives in. Mwangi on the other hand uses a girl as a protagonist. She struggles against all odds to make it in life. The two have used different settings for their stories. Mugo moves his protagonist from his home village and takes him through several approved schools. In these different schools the protagonist interacts with other characters from different parts of the country. These play a great role in shaping his vision. Mwangi moves his protagonist from a drought stricken village in the Rift valley to Nairobi where she links up with the priest who is a symbol of hope for Chebet and her siblings. The study interrogates the use of stylistic techniques like narration to highlight issues like poverty, peer pressure, cultural practices family relations and sexuality that are pertinent to the young adults in the contemporary society. It goes further to posit that such issues do affect other



young adults and therefore one should not view whatever they go through in life in isolation. The message the two have been able to put across is that it is not only the girl child who encounters a myriad of problems, the boy child is not any better. For all their suffering however, they emerge successful.

A number of studies have been conducted on children's literature and how much oral literature, in particular, helped in moulding the behavior of the children. The area of the young adult literature has not been researched on widely. I therefore wish to study the impact literature for young adults have on its readers, that is, presumably those that are between the ages of twelve to twenty one years.

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES**

The study aims to:

- i. Examine how writers present tensions among the young adults through young protagonists.
- ii. Compare and contrast the depiction of challenges encountered by the male characters and the female characters.
- iii. Compare and contrast the coping mechanisms by the male characters and female characters.
- iv. Identify the various strategies and stylistic choices used by each of the two authors to present issues affecting the young adults in the society.

## **1.4 HYPOTHESIS**

The study will investigate the hypothesis that;

- i. The protagonists used by writers can be role models for the young adults.
- ii. The challenges encountered by the male characters are not any different from those that are encountered by the female characters.
- iii. The coping mechanisms of the male characters are not any different from those of the female characters.
- iv. Stylistic choices made by the writers are those that help in passing the message intended for the young adults.

## **1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Asenath Odaga in *Literature for Children and Young People in Kenya* (1974) posits that local literature is in effect a most powerful weapon which could be used to revolutionize the thinking of the majority Kenyan youth (4). She argues that the most significant function of literature is to transmit cultural, moral and aesthetics values. These values she argues project and continue to perpetuate an image of the people or the nation (6).

In her study of children's and young adults' literature in the pre-colonial society, Odaga notes that oral literature was valued as one of the major means through which the society educated, instructed and socialized its youths. She felt that this was a very effective way of socializing the children and the young adults.

During the colonial era however, she questions the essence of teaching the colonial literature to the African children and young adults since all it did was to portray the African as savages. The books that were written by the imperialists portrayed the whites as being superior and completely ignored the African values. These included books like *Cinderella*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *King Solomon's Mine*. The imperialist and capitalistic standings of the whites were what were perpetuated. (34).

This however came to change gradually with independence. The upcoming writers embarked on creating an African image in their story books. The books written by the likes of Ngugi wa Thiong'o had an African setting and dealt with an array of themes. The issues treated in these books are contemporary in relation to the colonial and post colonial eras. The books not only aimed at both political and cultural revolution, but also aimed at making the children and the young people aware of the good and the bad in their society. The Africans are urged to find their correct image and an identity that is consistent with the general and the popular feelings of post independence; she applauds those African writers who have produced literature that has topics and plots which embrace contemporary issues in both urban and rural settings. Some children's books by Kenyan writers who, in her opinion, serve the above-mentioned tasks (among these she also mentions 'fight for cultural freedom') includes texts, such as *The Children of the Forest* by Joel Makumi (1968), *Onyango's Triumph* by Leo Odera Omolo (1968) and *The Eighth Wife* by Miriam Khamadi Were (1972).

Odaga makes an appeal to the Ministry of Education to get writers who can author literature that can make the Kenya youth proud of their heritage, cultural and aesthetic values. She further urges the writers to author literature which will uphold the personality and dignity of

the young adults (120). This is a call that she made way back in 1974. This seems to have been taken up positively and the books are now in the markets.

Many authors have come up in post colonial Kenya and have heeded Odaga's call to produce books that have an African setting and books that can make the African youth proud of their heritage. The books also serve to socialize the young adults. My study focuses on two contemporary writers whose work is meant to create an interest in reading as advocated by Odaga but with an aim of trying to establish how this literature can be used as a tool of socializing the youth in Kenya.

Mikhail.D.Gromov, in his research titled *Children's Literature in Kenya: a Mirror of Kenyan Culture* has echoed much of what Odaga highlighted in her book. He notes that tremendous results have been attained after the call made by Odaga on the need to have books written for the African children with an African setting in mind. This, he notes has been fulfilled because many publishing houses in Kenya had started producing books for the children. The call on getting more books in Kiswahili too seems to have got to some place after Kiswahili was made a compulsory subject in schools. The situation on the use of indigenous languages has however not been heeded since even most of the bookshops do not stock the books. As it is, very few books written in the indigenous languages are in the market.

Gromov goes ahead to respond to the allegation that there was no reading culture in Kenya. .Odaga posits that most books were read for exam purposes. In this, a random sampling of fifty school leavers from Nairobi was made and it was discovered that most of these school leavers remembered having read the set books in school. Outside the school, no reading was

done yet many books are in the market and can be used to positively transform the young adults. The books tackle issues that affect the young adults and by reading them, they can learn that they are not in isolation. My study focuses on this view in that the two novels I have researched on have been written with the intention of creating a variety of sources for the young adults in Kenya.

Gromov's main concern was the importance of using language to preserve culture. Contrary to claims that Kenyan languages are dying, he believes that this is not the case because they are passed on to the children via the word of mouth. He notes that language preserves and passes the cultural values and history. To acquaint people with their cultural values and history, they need to be provided with an appropriate language (204). My research sought to find out the linguistic choices made by the authors and how appropriate it is for the young adults.

Osayimwense Osa, the founder of *The Journal of African Children's and Youth Literature* (JACYL) posits that most of the African writers' motivation to write for children is a worthy and noble desire to mould young Africans along an acceptable African way of life. Their writing also reflect their own vision of what young Africans and their role in the society contributing in various aspects of Africa's cultural heritage. He also notes that literature has a didactic or moral stance. This is what has guided my research and I hope to use this to enrich my research.

Barbara.A.Githiora, in her dissertation *The influence of Literature in Young Children's Concept Formation* (1979), seeks to find out the children's worldview and how it is shaped and influenced by ideas derived from literature. Children from different social-economic

backgrounds were interviewed. She evaluates the oral narratives, riddles, nursery rhymes and religious songs taught to children in Sunday school. She also studies classics such as *Cinderella* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. After getting responses from children under the age of eight, she comes to a conclusion that the social, economic and cultural background of children influence and shape the young readers responses to literature.

Githiora examines the social content and the relevance of some of children's literature by analyzing the images projected by this literature. Githiora states that certain images in these children's stories convey the attitudes and the world view of the writers. These ideas are capable of shaping the value concept of the young readers (20). My study aims at looking at how writers through choice of language and characters can help shape the value concepts of the young adults.

Hellen Mwanzi in her thesis *An Analysis of Children's Prose Fiction* (1982) examines the role of imagery in children's story books. The thesis considers the responses of children aged between nine and eleven years. Mwanzi discusses the imagery in the literature she considers as 'Eurocentric and colonialist literature', and the imagery in Kenya based prose. She makes a close analysis of the writers' language, choice and manipulation of words and descriptions which evoke mental and concrete pictures in the readers' minds. She analyses the imagery in children's texts such as Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and Allan Quatermain's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, *Mary Plain to the Rescue*, *The villager's Son*, *The Good Medicine Bird* and *Captured by Raiders*. Mwanzi notes that the writers use of language to create mental and concrete images in children's stories are attitude laden and thus convey the writers world view which is deliberately aimed at influencing and shaping the young readers outlook. According to Mwanzi, (1982:3) literature is crucial to mental,

psychological and social development of a child. Literature stimulates the children's imagination and sharpens their awareness of the world around them. These are important social functions that make literature an essential tool in the process of socialization. My study aimed at finding out whether the young adults can be socialized through literature. Can this literature help the young adults cope with their challenges in life?

Paritas Trivedi in her thesis *Imagery and Children's Literature in Kenya; A case Study of Four Selected texts* (1991) focuses on the aesthetic and cognitive function of literature. She seeks to find out the role of imagery in contemporary children's literature in relation to the impressionability of the nine to twelve year old reader. Her main focus is on *Njamba Nene and the flying bus* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Courage to Dream* by Saleem Rana and *A Car Named Safari* by Juma Bustani. Her study explores the hypothesis that imagery in children's literature in Kenya is not just a rhetorical ornament, but is also a literary agent which helps in shaping the value system and outlook of the young reader.

The analysis of the four texts as well as the school children's own responses to imagery has shown that the writer's use of images to convey ideas, feelings and experiences is key to cognition of reality in its fullness. Most young readers are motivated to emulate positive images but although they recognized negative images, they were driven to rejecting them. The readers' own views on morality and immorality supported the contention by the thesis that imagery fulfils a cognitive function in children's literature. My study looks at the young adult, that is, those over the age of thirteen and how literature can help them shape their worldview.

Michael Weche in his MA thesis, *Children's literature as an image forming force: A case study of Ezekiel Alembe's books* (2000) has explored the kind of influence Alembe's children's

storybooks have on children who read them. He does this with the assumptions that the writer's works have a great influence on the Kenyan child's moral and social development, and that through the books, he, consciously or unconsciously influences the young Kenyan reader's world view.

His findings from the respondents show that Kenyan children expect books not only to entertain them but also to inform them. This finding is revealed in their overt rejection of vices such as stealing and selfishness. The readers' immediate responses to Alembe's works show that the books may have an influence on them. They reinforce their social and moral development. The responses to the books are culturally conceptualized. Thus the books enhance what the children get from education, Christianity and cultural set up.

The findings are significant in understanding the potential influence that children's literature in general has on children and also the possible influence that Alembe's books in particular have on the Kenyan child reader. Understanding the influence that the books may have on the young reader should help writers and patrons of children's literature to make suitable books to Kenyan children. My study aimed at establishing how literature can be used to change the worldview of young adults.

Joseph Muleka in his MA thesis, *Portrayal of Girl characters in Selected Children's Books in Kenya* (2001) posits that characterization in the books that children read is crucial in their character development, thus raising a need to investigate how character portrayal is done in children's books. In particular, the study examines how girl characters are portrayed in a literature emanating from a majorly patriarchal setting like the Kenyan one; a setting, which often privileges men over women. The study lays emphasis on examination of characters on



the parameter of sex and gender, while style was considered on the basis of how language is used to bring about gender differentiation.

The findings of the study reveal that the majority of Kenyan writers for children reflect in their writings the society's stereotypes about girl children, but a few are trying to emancipate their girl characters. The study predicts that stereotyping of girl characters may not only impede the social, mental and emotional growth of girl children, but could also prejudice the way their boy counterparts view them. The study advocates for a literature that will seek to emancipate girl children, enabling them to compete equitably with boy children. My study aims at illustrating how the female lead character can be empowered thus making her a role model for others.

Miriam Musonye in her PHD thesis; *Images of Peace, Conflict and Displacement in Refugee Children's Narratives: the cases of Nairobi and Kakuma*. (2010) focused on the use of the narrative in the understanding of the children's perception of peace, conflict and displacement. She states that the analysis of a writer's use of language has therefore shown that imagery holds a key position in style, that, it is through images that the content is revealed to the readers in an aesthetic manner. She notes that the personal and fictional narratives composed by children reveal the children's perception of themselves and reality and are therefore useful in investigating children's worldview. Through narratives, refugee children not only express their perception of reality but also navigate through reality of displacement.

The research findings are that refugee children's narratives addressed issues that are directly related to the conditions of their lives. This was expressed in the key themes identified. These included food and resource management and distribution, relationship between children and

adults and finally socio-economic relationships. It further reveals that key images were directly linked to central themes, peace images are identified as availability and equitable sharing of food, friendship and absences of quarrels while images of conflict were identified as lack or inequitable distribution of food, destruction of friendship and quarrels. My study looks at those issues that the young adults can directly relate to and how this can help them change in life. How it can help them live with others in the society.

My research hopes to give further contribution to the wealth of knowledge researched on the literature of children and that of young adults.

## **1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The sociological literary theory will help us evaluate the actions of the characters and their response to society. We will also investigate how these characters are shaped by the society they live in and how it helps them define themselves and others; in the two novels. The sociological criticism is based on social constructions. This focuses on how social phenomena or objects of consciousness develop within social contexts. Sociological literary criticism is directed to understanding literature in its social context. The rise of this approach is associated with Kenneth Burke, a 20<sup>th</sup> century literary and critical theorist in his article *‘literature as equipment for living.’* Sociological criticism analyses both how social reality is reflected in literature and how literature works in society. According to Kenneth Burke, works of art, including literature are “strategic naming of situations” that allows the reader to better understand and “gain a sort of control” over societal happenings through the work of art (Adams 542). He considers pieces of art as systematic reflections of society and societal behavior.

This theory endeavors to establish the relationship between literature and society. Literature is set and consumed within a specific social context. Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Writers in politics* (1981) posits that: "art has a function". For him, the very act of writing is a social act. This theory will guide me in illuminating the conditions, possibilities and social structures that influence the young adults in the society they live in.

Okot P. Bitek echoes Ngugi in *Africa's Cultural Revolution* (1973) when he talks of literature "as a living social art". It is not a collection of old classics but an intensely expressive activity which aims at publicly communicating deeply felt emotions. He further argues that, sometimes, it may be designed to amuse or instruct, but the best literature never fails to make a profound effect on the whole community. From this perspective we will interrogate the portrayal of social ills that affect youth in the contemporary society and how they maneuver around them.

This study will also draw from the formalism critical approach to analyze, interpret and evaluate the texts. This will be guided by the objective of identifying the stylistic choices the writers use to pass their message to the young adults with an intention of changing them. This theoretical approach focuses on the literariness of a text. It further focuses on the structural elements of a work of art such as language, structure and the underlying tone the writer uses.

Formalism has two branches which are the Russian formalism whose major proponent is Vladimir Prop. The other is the New criticism whose major proponents included T.S Eliot, Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks just to mention a few. The Russian formalist approach insists that literary language is different from everyday language. This calls for a close scrutiny of the language an author uses in order to communicate his ideas.

The formalists are interested in reading a text closely with the intention of evaluating the arrangement of the work. In my research I will be interested in the stylistic elements that the authors use to highlight the thematic concerns in their novels.

My study is guided by the insights of Ivor Armstrong Richards, who argues that a theory in criticism must offer both a theory of 'value' and a theory of communication. His arguments are based on the assumption that poems or literature communicate value grounded in the reconciliation of conflicting 'impulses' in the experiences of the poet (46). This will help the study draw close scrutiny to the text with the aim of accounting for the use of style through identifying the themes and what the writer is using and the meaning that is communicated.

## **1.7 METHODOLOGY**

This study relies on a close textual reading of the two selected primary texts. This is to help in the analysis and the interpretation of the texts within the theoretical framework mentioned above. Close textual reading will enable me to identify the stylistic choices made by the authors in a bid to pass their message to the readers. It has also helped me in identifying the characters with the intention of finding out what motivates their behaviour. The study further examines the way the authors have used protagonists who the readers can identify with, and look upon them as their role models. The protagonists serve the purpose of socializing them. I have used a library research to get secondary materials and accessed online databases to get scholarly journals. I have interviewed the two authors to get clarification on some of the concerns raised in the novels.

## **1.8 SCOPE AND LIMITATION**

I limit myself to the two primary texts to enable me to find out how the two novels can impact on the young adult readers. Of major concern is the deliberate stylistic choices made by the authors to make the novels generate interest to the said group and pass the message.

My research has also benefited from secondary material such as e-journals to enable me get the required information.

## **1.9 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

Chapter One, comprises the introduction to the thesis, the statement of the problem, the objectives, hypothesis, justification, literature review, the theoretical frame work and the methodology.

Chapter Two considers how Mugo's *Never Say Never* portrays the protagonists in the novel as a role model for the young adult readers. It pays close attention to the challenges faced by the protagonists and how they overcome their tribulations to emerge victorious. I explain that despite growing up in dire need, one can shape their destiny. It also looks at the role played by narration and use of images in highlighting major thematic concerns in the novel.

Chapter Three examines how Mwangi's *The Delegate* explores major concerns like poverty, peer pressure, cultural practices, love and family relations that greatly shape the young adults worldview. The writer presents a protagonist who gets empowered through her interaction with other characters. Her resilience is what drives her.

Chapter Four seeks to make a comparative study of the two novels and examine how the two authors present the issues affecting the boy- child and the girl- child in Kenya in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and how they negotiate the tensions.

Chapter five concludes the study. It summarizes how the two writers have highlighted concerns that affect the young adults in the contemporary Kenyan society. The findings demonstrate that if young adults do read the literature written for them they can change their worldview. Areas for future research are also suggested.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE MALE PROTAGONIST AS A ROLE MODEL FOR THE YOUNG ADULTS

#### 2.1 Introduction

“Young people like to look up to individuals who can inspire them. These people have a set of values that aspiring individuals believe in, or feel strongly drawn to; role models have commitment to a certain affinity of excellence. In some instances, they have achieved greatly; emerging successful even in hardest of situations.” These are the sentiments of Derek Bbanga a public image and communications consultant in an article in The Standard Digital of 17<sup>th</sup> May 2013 *“Twisted’ image of a role model.*

He further argues that being a role model is achieved through personal branding and that a person cannot declare themselves a role model but can become one even without focusing on achieving the title.

A role model is that person who possesses qualities that others would like to have. A role model affects others in a way that makes them aspire to be better people and also inspires others to make a difference. That person who serves as model in a particular behavioural or social role for another person to emulate qualifies to be called a role model. They play an important role in inspiring people to learn, overcome obstacles, and understand that positive values can be lived each day. Young adults will look up to parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, political leaders, church leaders, sports coaches, and peers for inspiration. Role models are commonly likened to mentors, heroes, leaders and charismatic individuals and, put simply, are seen to possess a set of characteristics and personal attributes that make

them stand out from the crowd. Such virtues include kindness, empathy towards all living creatures, persistence, courage, altruism, compassion, dedication and creativity. Role models are those people who have the ability to motivate and inspire others, unique and positive people from whom others can learn, and those that possess values and beliefs that promote empathy and wellbeing in all living creatures. Role modeling involves leading by example, adopting positive behaviours and encouraging others to believe in and stand up for what is right. The influence and direction that role models can have on the day-to-day lives of people is second to none.

The youth in Kenya are in constant search for role models. This is because they are maturing and are in need of guidance as they develop both physically and mentally. They need a constant reminder that they are not growing up in isolation but others around them also face similar conditions. Most would wish to identify with certain media personalities and celebrities whom to many are a source of inspiration. Many will choose people they are hardly in contact with as their role models. However, when people are in direct and frequent contact with their role models, such as family members, peers and teachers, the guidance provided is often much more holistic. Seeing firsthand how a given 'hero' feels, behaves and develops, in light of a trying situation, encourages individuals to renegotiate their responses when they find themselves in a similar position. Literature books can provide the young adults with role models. This is in the name of the heroes and heroines presented in young adults' literature as they strive to understand themselves and others, and as they aspire to grasp concepts of morality.

Reed (1994) in her book *Reading Adolescents: The Young Adult Book and the School* posits that the protagonists in the books for young adult readers are usually young, larger than life and realistic. Young adult readers are able to identify with the protagonist. Protagonists'



peers are portrayed either as the protagonists' source of conflict or their best friends. The story is told from the protagonist's point of view and presents the voice of the protagonist. The characters in these books are those that young adults can easily identify with. The characters must be presented as individuals and not stereotypes. This is because the young adults should not be presented with distortions but real life characters. The protagonists presented strives to achieve their goals without whining or pitying themselves over failures. For the young adults, the truly appealing character is not wholly good or wholly bad but one that possesses a balance of positive and negative qualities. The good should outweigh the bad and the negative should however be chosen with care since they affect the flow of the story.(39). The weaknesses chosen by the author should be those that serve a purpose. These might be impulsiveness, exaggeration, procrastination and weakness which also make the lead character appear human and likeable because the reader co-identifies with the sort of imperfect person and sympathizes with his predicaments. The protagonist should extol values of patience, hard work, being empathetic as per the dictates of the society.

### **2.1.1 Mugo Anthony's choice of protagonist**

Mugo in *Never Say Never* uses a protagonist with whom many Kenyan young adults would identify with. Muthini is brought up by his mother Njoki, in extremely difficult circumstances. She enrolls him at Kiambiriria School, a name used to symbolically stand for beginning. This in a way suggests that it was the beginning of his many tribulations. He drops out of school at class four since his mother could not raise the building fund. Life back at home is unbearable since his mother, after the divorce, is not even welcome at his grandmother's home. She farms at the cemetery that is among the dead, to supplement the little money she gets from selling bananas at the market and working as a casual in the coffee

farms. After being out of school for two years, Muthini is arrested and taken to a remand home after which he is moved from one approved school to another till he completes form four. This makes him to be treated with a lot of suspicion not only by his immediate family members but also the society at large. He has to deal with this rejection and at one time opts to take Marijuana to feel wanted. All these efforts are futile. He embarks on serious studies as a way of ensuring that he excels in school. Despite the many shortcomings, his becomes a story of success. Mugo has used a protagonist who has experienced what most young adults in Kenya are facing today. This is a character that the youth can use as a role model and can help them change the way they view life.

Muthini Njoki the lead character faces ridicule from the classmates in standard one because of using his mother's name. He says "It was an invitation to ridicule for a boy to bear a female name" (4). He further argues that the mother registered him in her name because he was not baptized and she did not have a husband. He does not hate his classmates for that since they had fathers and were baptized. For their young minds they could hardly comprehend what it meant to lack a father. Muthini exudes a character that many at his age would not have. He is understanding and does not lay blame on his classmates who treat him as an object of ridicule. Society dictates that a child should bear a father's name and when Muthini gives his mother's name, this evokes laughter from his classmates. His teacher diffuses this laughter when he tells the pupils that he is also referred to as "Wa Njoki" he impresses upon the students to be proud of their mothers. Muthini henceforth counts his blessings and is appreciative that he has a mother.

'Muthini' which is a Kikuyu name, when translated in English, means poverty. The author highlights poverty thus:

They also laughed at my uniform .My shorts were patched at the rear, my sweater at the elbows and my shirt at the shoulder and collar. My mother was an expert in needlework doing all the patchwork at home (4-5).

The description of the kind of uniform he wore to school gives an insight on the kind of poverty Muthini grew up in. It gives him a ground to exemplify how much proud of his mother he was. He praises her expertise at doing the needle work. Affected he may be by the laughter that the patch work evoked, but he was proud of his mother's work. Muthini clearly comes out as a person who is not ashamed of his poverty. He seems to be passing on a message that people should not be ashamed of their backgrounds.

His tribulations do not end with the kind of uniform he wore to school .He is always on the list of the building fund defaulters and this is what makes him get thrown out of school in class four. This frustrates him .Muthini confesses that he was not very much bothered by his classmates but by Mr. Maringa, the head teacher, who sent him out of school from time to time. He had to develop survival tactics that saw him stay in school; such is the determination that Muthini displays right at an early age in his quest to get an education, which ironically he was not so enthusiastic about initially. His frustrations at missing out in school are highlighted when he says that he does not know who he should blame for his woes; poverty was driving his mother into a depression and there was nothing he could do to alleviate the situation which seems to grow from bad to worse progressively. For instance his mother is not only thrown out of her home but her business is destroyed, and as if that is not enough, someone steals all the harvest expected at the garden they had acquired at the cemetery. The writer presents the reader with such a situation to show the level of desperation on the part of Muthini and the mother who seem to have no option but to dig among the dead to get a livelihood. He does not heap any blame on his mother but appreciates the fact that she works

hard to fend for her family. In spite of the hardships they are facing, he admires his mother and does not become bitter from destitution.

It becomes a welcome idea when the protagonist is “arrested” and he gets a promise of getting back to school. He gives a description of his first day in the police custody. A chill ran up his spine when he witnesses the handling of the inmates. He is amazed at how quickly the likes of ‘Kabangi’ adapt to the cells. This is one of the nights that he really dreaded in his life. As if the ordeal at the police station was not bad enough, he finds himself in a remand home though he had committed no crime to warrant it. The living conditions in the home are wanting. A bucket served as a toilet while they slept on mats on the floor and one blanket covered as many as three boys. When his days at the remand home are over, he is all excitement at the prospect of joining a school in the city. Such are the frustrations Muthini encounters in his quest for education. The author uses this to portray how persevering Muthini is. The thing that keeps him going was the fact that at the end of it all his aspiration to get to school would be realized. Though he gets frustrated at first, he manages to attend a series of approved schools. He observes “the environment was far from conducive, but I was learning” (46). The positive spirit is what keeps him going. In the approved schools, he is treated like an inmate; he mixes with the likes of Karanchu, who will do anything to ensure that Muthini joins him in his mischief. Muthini is left to make a choice on the side he wishes to lean on. Muthini has to face the bullies like Kazi Bure and also learn survival tactics in the institutions. In spite of the hardships he encounters, he manages to score a grade B in the Kenya Certificate for Secondary Education.

The author presents the reader with a protagonist who struggles against all odds to achieve that which he always desired in life. The author gives his protagonist such a hard start in life with a view of appealing to the readers with similar issues. He seems to suggest that just like

Muthini is not ashamed of his poverty, the readers should also follow suit. The protagonist does not blame his mother for his woes. He is full of admiration for his mother who, though at the verge of giving up, does not let her desperation to get the part of her. The author suggests that the predicaments that befall him are not unique. This can be a source of inspiration to the contemporary Kenyan youths who come from poverty ridden backgrounds and tend to lose meaning in life. It is the author's way of telling them that others have had difficult times in life and made it. They too can borrow a leaf from Muthini's life.

### **2.1.2 Approved schools as a way of impacting discipline.**

A research conducted by Thonden, Yoden for Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project titled *JUVENILE INJUSTICE: Police abuse and detention of street children in Kenya* (1997) explains that there are eleven approved schools in Kenya: one for the reception and distribution of children to other approved schools, four for children in need of "protection and care", and six for children in need of "protection and discipline." According to the Children's Department, "the protection and care category handles and rehabilitates [children] who are non-offenders but lack responsible parenthood, homeless, and destitute who require care, support, and protection. The other category, protection and discipline, caters for juvenile delinquents and those beyond parental control. Muthini makes his way through a number of these institutions starting from the remand home to the discharge centre up to the point when he goes to Kabete Approved School, where he does his form four exam and eventually becomes a free man.

The research further reveals that in Kenya, a wide range of alternatives to custodial treatment are provided for under the Children and Young Persons Act, yet magistrates still tend to overuse institutionalization as a remedial measure for young offenders. Conditions in these institutions fail to provide children with the education and rehabilitative training that they

purport to, and children leave these institutions emotionally and physically scarred, stigmatized, and negatively influenced by their peers who may be serious criminal offenders. In the institutions, little effort is made to separate the children by category of their underlying offense or status, resulting in children who are homeless being mixed with children convicted of serious criminal offenses. At Murang'a Juvenile Remand Home where Muthini is taken after spending a night in the cells, he has the first encounter with Karanchu who had been born and raised in the streets of Nairobi. Karanchu "was a confessed thief who could snatch such valuables as wrist watches, purses or necklaces in broad daylight and disappear into thin air"(18).The escapades he shared with the other young boys made them envious of his achievements. Perhaps this is the writer's way of expressing his displeasure at what the government does when it mixes up the seasoned criminals with the innocent. Karanchu seems to be finding glory in his wayward ways since he is said to be "ever smiling to the world, while stress was killing the rest of us"(18).When presented in such a way the young minds are likely to be in favour of the wrong doers who seem to be having less worries.

At Getathuru Reception and Discharge Centre Muthini finds himself yet again in the same institution with Karanchu who had been some sort of a hero at the remand home. He says: "The first hour gave me the shivers. It was like waking up and finding yourself in a lion's den.... Back at Murang'a Remand Home, Karanchu had seemed a veteran, but here, he was seriously overshadowed."(21).The author seems to be making a statement on the kind of people Muthini had to mix with. While Karanchu was seen as some sort of a hero in the remand home, at the reception and discharge home, there seemed to be others who were worse than him. The writer uses the image of the lion's den to show the fear created in the protagonist. Lions are dangerous animals and if one finds himself in their den, chances of survival are minimal. This is the author's way of expounding on some of the predicaments Muthini had to encounter. In the institutions it seemed "Somehow, having broken the law

seemed heroic, whereas the opposite sounded naïve” (46). Muthini chooses to keep his affairs to himself to avoid being branded naïve. The presentation of these episodes seems to be glorifying the wrong at the expense of the good. The message the author seems to be passing is that it is the duty of the reader to make a choice on which said to lean. There is a high probability that they would influence each other.

At Kericho Approved School, Muthini gets to know Mbiru. Just like Karanchu, Mbiru earns himself some admiration from Muthini when he teaches him how to get a free loaf of bread by faking their teacher’s signature. He does not hide his admiration for the ‘heroes’ when he states that the likes of Karanchu and Mbiru, who were street-wise and self-styled, were more appealing than the real teachers “and had a lot of followers. While real teachers taught us how to face the future, the street-wise ones gave survival skills; glue-sniffing and petrol sniffing to fight reality...” (56-57). The influence the street-wise ‘teachers’ had was overwhelming. The author, through his protagonist, makes a statement about the correctional institutions in the country. While it is common knowledge that the institutions are out to change those that pass through them, it is clear that a few good “inmates” are influenced by the street-wise ones who teach them survival tactics, which are against the moral grain. It is no wonder that the street-wise teachers got a larger following than the real teachers. Where children from many different backgrounds and sent to the schools for diverse reasons, are mixed together; serious offenders may negatively influence other children who are there simply because they are homeless, abandoned, or orphaned. At one point Karanchu is portrayed like some hero among his peers. He amazes Muthini with his tactics whenever they meet. For instance when he tells Karanchu about his inability to approach girls for fear of rejection, he promises to help out. He confesses:

“My admiration for Karanchu’s resourcefulness was growing by the minute. No problem was too big for him or complex for him to handle. I could hardly wait to learn from the master” (96).

Karanchu earns admiration because he seems to have a solution for every problem Muthini has. Other than getting him a solution, Muthini ends up as a source of ridicule by his friends. The Marijuana they gave him turns him into a laughing stock. May be it is the author’s way of commenting on the kind of ‘solutions’ offered by Karanchu and his cronies. Karanchu also devices a way of stealing blankets from the institution. This he discloses to Muthini on the day he got his release from Kabete Approved School. This is a clear way of indicating that the system had failed in correcting him. He is let out to the society having perfected his act.

In the approved schools, canings, deprivation of home leave, hard labor, being put in isolation and being denied food are used as punishments. Muthini has to watch as corporal punishment is administered to fellow inmates by the staff, and physical abuse by other boys. At Getathuru Reception and Discharge Centre, some two boys had attempted to escape and Muthini witnesses as “ They were stripped naked and table salt rubbed into their bottoms before being awarded the famous Six Strong Ones” (23). When Wambua, Malete and Karanchu escape, to send a warning to those others intending to escape; “Wambua was flogged mercilessly in front of the parade. He would be locked up in a small room called Towett 2 with just enough food to keep him alive” (37).The same fate befalls Malete and Karanchu.The punishments are given with a view of correcting the wrong doers and also serve as a warning to the other students. The punishment seems to be so cruel to the young offenders. Although approved schools are supposedly aimed at educating and rehabilitating children for return to society, this is an issue worth refuting. The approved schools in which Muthini is taken do not only act as an eye opener to him but also the readers. They do change those who want to change,



but those who do not want to change like Karanchu get crime entrenched in them and the end result is death. The message the writer wishes to pass is that the approved schools do not change those that are not ready to change however much the punishments are directed to them. Such diehards end up badly as Muthini observes;

I had not witnessed anyone die before [sic] and it was horrible for someone I knew so well to be the first .The scene depressed my soul. It meant that the seven years Karanchu had spent in the correction institution was waste of time [sic] and resources. Who was to blame, the management, his genes, or were some people born to live a turbulent life then die young? How many had ended up like Karanchu upon earning their freedom? (136).

Muthini expresses feelings of despair after witnessing the death of Karanchu. He does not openly pass judgment on him since he does not seem to comprehend on whom the blame should fall. He poses an open question on the reader when he wonders how many had ended up like Karanchu after gaining their freedom. The statement made here is that those that refuse to heed to the teachings from their parents or educators will get the lessons the hard way. Karanchu passes through the system but it does not change him. These episodes are used by the author to question the punishments meted out in approved schools.

In putting this episode at the forefront, the author is questioning the effectiveness of approved schools which are meant to be correctional centers for young offenders .He is ,however, quick to let the reader know that those that do not get corrected in the approved schools end up badly. Freedom according to him should not be abused. Through Muthini, the author poses a question on who was to blame for those inmates that did not get changed by the system. The question should get the readers of these novels thinking. The author is however

very keen on not letting the negatives triumph. He has to let the reader know that evil does not go unpunished. They should not applaud the likes of Karanchu

.

The narrator explores life in these correctional centers. Bullying is common place, for instance, Kazi Bure pours water on Muthini's bed for having denied him a chance to pick his piece of meat. Wambua, another of the narrators schoolmates has to suffer silently when the school captain turns to "using him as his wife" (43). The issue of homosexuality is highlighted. Wambua does not take this lying down. The author is quick to highlight the fact that those who engage in socially deviant behavior need to be dealt with. To make himself feel wanted in the society, the narrator experiments with drugs. He does this when he succumbs to peer- pressure. The experiences that Muthini encounters in the approved schools only serve to make him stronger.

Mugo however suggests that not all who go through the approved schools are criminals. They are able to pass judgment on what is wrong and what is good. The few like Karanchu who do little to correct their behavior are eliminated by the system. Not all in the society are judgmental about those that go through the approved school system. Agnes understands Muthini's predicament and helps him with books. Muthini is elated when he does well in his exams courtesy of the help he got from Agnes.

### **2.1.3 Negotiating rejection by society**

For Muthini, going to school after having been dismissed by Mr. Maringa, his headmaster at Kiambiriria, is like being given a second chance in life. This however, opens avenues for ridicule and rejection by friends and his immediate family.

Muthini encounters many challenges that boys of his age do face, for instance, he has to contend with the loss of his mother, the only relative who ever cared for him. He remembered his mother “as one of the stars shinning [sic] bright smiling down at me” (83). The image of the star he uses is a way of applauding his mother, who did all she could to ensure that he got the best in life. After the death of his mother, his grandmother and uncle offer to take him in. He is excited at the prospect of being home after being away for two years. His excitement is cut short immediately he gets to Kiambiriria. He says “I smelt trouble at once. There is a way people communicate with their eyes. They could be tight-lipped but you still get the message loud and clear” (68-69). He feels that the people did not have to tell him openly that he was not welcome, their eyes told him all. He faces rejection from members of the community who seem to judge him so harshly because of the green uniform he was wearing. The society frowns at those that wear uniform which is synonymous with the correctional centers for the young offenders. Muthini is constantly reminded that he does not belong. He is nearly lynched on his way back to school when he gets a crowd watching an acrobatic troupe. Somebody claims to have lost his money and when he checks around, his eyes fall on him and he demands for his money from him. The police man who rescues him is quick to remind him that his uniform means “Guilty as charged” (76). The author seems to be questioning the society which is not ready to integrate those that have been to the correctional centers. They are only too quick to judge.

To them he was an inmate who should be treated with caution. He feels that they did not have to talk about it since their eyes said it all. He never got a chance to narrate the stories he had prepared because his audience remained a fantasy. All he met was a suspicious society that asked degrading questions on whether they were caned during breakfast, lunch and supper (33). The stereotype the society has about those that are taken to approved schools is highlighted. Muthini is branded as a criminal though he was innocent. Children do not accord

him a better treatment. Whenever he got them playing, they always lost interest in the game and eventually left. This gives him a very bad feeling.

His relatives treat him with a lot of suspicion “at home I was stranger. My relatives treated me with caution. Phobia was mirrored in their eyes” (71). This is the height of rejection for a young boy who needed people to understand him. He does not understand the fear he sees in their eyes. This rejection makes Muthini feel like an outsider in his own home. When the holiday comes to an end, they bid him goodbye guardedly. He feels he had not met their expectations. He feels rejection even in the questions they asked about his school. The questions were not genuine and did not even draw empathy from those inquiring. He therefore decided to divulge as little information as possible. It however gives him the opportunity to prove them wrong, especially Patrick’s father, who tells him “I must confess that I was a little apprehensive when I allowed you back” (74). The uncle arrives at this conclusion after witnessing him talk to Wang’iu, a former inmate. Muthini turns down the offer to join Wang’iu for a ‘mission’ he had with Kabangi. Muthini shows his maturity in passing judgment and making choices when he chooses not to join the fellow ‘inmates’ despite the rejection he is experiencing from the society. He wonders why the family ever wanted him back, yet they give him such cold treatment.

His family is not the only one that treats him like some outcast, Annastasia, his dream girlfriend wants him to confess to having stolen when he knew too well that he was not a thief and had no criminal record. He resolves to stop trying to prove his innocence to the people:

Despite knowing I was innocent, I was more bothered by what other people thought of me. I lived with the fear of their wrong conclusions to the extent of taking marijuana so that I could portray a different

character .I came to the bitter conclusion that I could not change a thing. The fact was that I could not rewrite history. That I was arrested, gone through a remand home, Getathuru, Kericho, Othaya and now Kabete was indelible, unalterable and a fabric of my existence. No matter how zealous I was to change and impress them, I remained Daniel Muthini Njoki; an innocent inmate-a very blessed person given the circumstances. Convincing the masses of my innocence was impossible (106-107).

Muthini has to face the harsh reality that no matter how hard he tried, he was a marked person. The society judges him too harshly. At some point he indulges in drugs but later comes to realize that Marijuana could not erase that which people thought about him. This makes a turning point for Muthini .He decides there and then that he is not going to spend his entire life trying to impress people. He did not need their respect since he owed nobody an apology and should therefore struggle to quench his thirst for education. A line he had once seen somewhere becomes his guiding light: “If it is not necessary to do it, it is necessary not to do it” (107).He feels that there is no necessity in trying to have people accept him. Neither the relatives nor the society needed to give him an approval. He scoffs at those that did not come to his rescue when he had been thrown out of school and spent two years of hopelessness. They had offered him no alternative, yet they disapproved of his school.

The author sounds a warning to those who indulge in drugs as a way of getting acceptance in the society. They cannot earn one acceptance in the society. Mugo is urging young adults to abstain from dwelling on their problems but rather use them as the spring board to improved living. The young Kenyan adult is given an insight into the fact that somebody’s history cannot be easily erased and whether innocent or guilty, there is a limit to trying to make the

society accept and take the individual with a questionable past as part of them. Muthini decides to channel all his energy in quenching the great thirst he had for education. Thus the firm message the author wants to pass across to the young adults, is that they should desist from dwelling on that which constantly brings him down but should aim at making a better life.

The decision Muthini makes enables him to concentrate on his studies and he eventually emerges victorious .He says that he gets “new energy” (107) he was “unstoppable”. He decided to concentrate on his studies and keep at bay any thoughts of girls. He resolves; “This was not the time; their time would come” (108).He uses up all the available time studying. He allocated himself tests from the few revision books he had. He sits for the form four exams and gets a grade that makes people respect him. The school manager is elated that they are sending someone to the university. When he gets back home the reception he receives is different from the initial one. He notes: “I arrived home to changed society. Everyone wanted to know if indeed it was true I had done well” (140).He no longer sees the look of condemnation in their eyes. This time round “They did not accuse or rebuke, they appreciated me” (140).He feels that were his mother alive, she would have been the happiest. She was the only person who ever believed in him. Resilience and determination is what finally earns Muthini acceptance into the society .Had he given up, maybe, he would have ended up like Karanchu who used Marijuana “to fight stigma” (151).The rejection he faces from the society at one time stigmatizes him but he makes a decision not to ever struggle to please anyone, his life takes a different turn. This should be a lesson for those that want to get an acceptance in a society that sees them as rejects.

Mugo does not paint Muthini as a good protagonist through and through .Like other young men, he experiments with alcohol and drugs. Together with Onsogo, they unearth some

Busaa which they take in turns .This however, does not go unpunished when Onsogo drinks and starts singing in class. Muthini also experiments with drugs. This he does under peer pressure when he is convinced by Karanchu that “it would give him wings it would also make me forget that I was an inmate who was not readily welcome in the society let alone in a girl’s heart’’ (99) .The experience he has after that makes him decide to keep off drugs but this earns him ridicule from Jeff, his cousin’s friend, who thinks that he does not take Marijuana because he is used to hard stuff. The ridicule does not however make him to change his mind about drugs.

The author makes it clear that his hero, who should be a role model to the readers, is not impervious to peer- pressure. What the reader should know however, is that at the end of it all, it is the person’s choice that matters. One will only succeed if he fails to keep looking at himself as a social outcast and do all that it takes to prove the others wrong.

The author succeeds in presenting a protagonist who is a role model to young adults in the contemporary Kenyan society .A protagonist who struggles to survive, struggles with frustrations of rejection but finally emerges victorious .He has created a humane character who rises above the many challenges to cut a niche in his life. He has resolved the action in his novel in such a way that the protagonist evolves on a hopeful note .The protagonist does not end up like Karanchu who was a hero among peers but ends up dying painfully. The author applauds Muthini for his resilience and determination to forge on despite the many hurdles he encounters in life.

In conclusion Mugo, has succeeded in using a protagonist that young adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can identify with. Muthini as presented by the author is not impervious to the many challenges the youth in the contemporary Kenya do face. While many sit back and keep imploring the government to come to their aid, Muthini struggles through life and as the story

comes to a close, there is hope that his life has taken a different twist. The readers can borrow a leaf from the protagonist and start looking at life positively.

Succumbing to peer- pressure should not be an excuse for any young adult who does not make it in life. Out of frustrations, Muthini succumbs to peer pressure only to realize much later that taking drugs does not alleviate his problems. They do not make him get accepted in the community that does nothing but shun his kind. The author does not present a protagonist who is out of the ordinary. The protagonist, like any other young man experiments with drugs but does not get immersed in them. He may be thrilled by Karanchu's escapades, but he does not indulge in his activities. He is portrayed as a person who knows when to say no. For the young adults who are becoming of age, he is an embodiment of reason, someone that most must strive to emulate.

## **2.2. Narrative aspects in Mugo, Anthony's *Never Say Never*.**

The choice of the narrator in young adults' literature is crucial since more often than not, the narrator plays a crucial role in forming a link between a work of art and the reader. It is the perspective of the narrator that determines who and what the readers look at in a story, how they look at it, what details they focus on, and for how long they will look. It is the narrator who organizes the reader's view and opinion of issues by being the force at the center of the narrative –controlling, shaping and guiding the action there in. A work of art, more so a story cannot be said to be a story if it lacks in narration, which is the process of presenting a narrative. Closely linked to narration is narrative point of view which determines in whose perspective the story is told. In prose writing, the narrative voice is an important aspect. This narrative voice determines the manner through which the story is told. A narrator is pivotal in any work of art.



Young adult novels have commonly used a first-person point of view in which the adolescent character takes an “I” position in the story, and thus all the events in the text are presented from a single point of view. In other words, the perceptions, feelings, and thoughts of this protagonist-narrator dominate the text. Even though other young adult novels use the third-person point of view, they seem to conform to a requirement that YA novels be narrated from the adolescent’s point of view. Nilsen and Donelson (1993) observe that YA novelists often “write through the eyes of a young person” (20) and that “point-of-view is expressed largely through the person who tells the story.” (77). Similarly, Small (1992) characterizes YA novels as narratives based on “the perspective of the main character” to present an “adolescent interpretation of events and people,” whether the point of view is first or third person (283). Moreover, it is supposed that YA novels must employ a single, unified narratorial position, which is stipulated: the young adult “story has to be told from a consistent point of view.” (Nilsen & Donelson, 1993,77).

### **2.2.1 The narrator as a youth in a changing society**

Depending on an author’s vision and mission, the choice of the kind of narrator to use is paramount. The narrator sustains the narrative and gives the readers a voice of explanation for the events that take place in it. In addition, narrators present their own perspectives upon which they interpret the material in a narrative both characters and events.

Mugo chooses to use the first person or the ‘I’ narrator, to pass his vision to the readers. Muthini serves not only as a narrator but also as the protagonist in *Never Say Never*. The story unfolds as the reader is taken through the experiences of Muthini who is not only the protagonist but also the narrator. The first person narrator is also a character in the story. The

'I' narrator expresses deeply internal and otherwise unspoken thoughts openly to the audience. The 'I' narrator takes actions, makes judgments and has opinions and biases that are expressed to the audience to enable it understand other characters and also the message being conveyed.

An author may also, depending on the message he wants to put across, be forced to choose his narrator on gender and age basis. There are those who would like to use women or girls as their narrators while others choose to use men or boys. Some may be forced to use adults, others youth and still others may opt for children as their key narrators. Mugo's narrator, who is a child and the protagonist of the story, enables the reader to identify with the happenings in the story. He is presented as a person coming of age and is able to overcome the various challenges he encounters in life. Through the narrator, the issues of poverty, education, peer - pressure, and family relations are highlighted.

Mugo takes us through the life of the narrator from the day he joins class one to the day he goes for clearance in the children's office after finishing fourth form. He does not only address issues of physical growth on the part of the narrator but he also addresses issues of his maturity. The story unfolds through the eyes of the narrator.

The narrator's innocence is captured right from the first day he goes to school. The story starts when the narrator is in class four but through a flash back, he informs the reader about the humiliation he under goes when he went to enroll in class one. He does not seem to understand why his mother is infuriated at his missing a vacancy in nursery school. 'I could hardly see why she was so mad. To my young mind, it was much ado about nothing. I could not figure out why school was so important.'(2).The innocent child narrator underscores the value of education as a child though ironically, he spends many sleepless nights at the thought of not getting a proper education when thrown out of school at class four. The

narrator expresses the feelings of many children of his age who would rather play than go to school. The author prepares the reader, through the narrator, to get to understand the value parents attach to educating their children while on the other hand; the children find it to be a waste of time. The quest for education is an issue that Mugo captures in his story. He uses images that show how eager Muthini's mother was to get her son enrolled to school and also it captures the young boy's attitude towards school. He states that adapting to school life was not easy since; "it was like domesticating a wild animal." (3). The narrator compares himself to a wild animal since he takes time to get used to the new school environment. The reason given for this is that it is a whole new experience which he gets accustomed to with time and starts enjoying his stay.

It is unfortunate that just when the narrator feels that he has finally settled down and got used to the school routine, the headmaster mercilessly throws him out. The reader cannot help but empathize with the narrator. He had lied to keep himself in school but his lies have come to an end. When summoned he says:

"I stood, my legs trembling. I stumbled to the front, dozens of pairs of eyes riveted on me. I was trembling all over now, more from realization of how reckless my lie had been than from its aftermath. The headmaster had every right to be mad and I deserved to be punished" (6).

The narrator adopts a confessional tone which makes the reader empathize with him. He knows very well that lying is bad but it seems to be the only other option to enable him stay in school. The description given of the headmaster as having "a temper of a wounded rhino" (6) was reason enough for the young boy not to be able to raise an objection for being sent away from school. The "survival tactics" (5) he had developed to keep himself no longer seem to work. What is evidently captured here is the use of images that are endearing to the

young adults mind to raise an issue that affects a number of them in a very light manner. Through the narrator, the author is able to highlight a number of thematic concerns.

### **2.2.1 Family relations**

The narrator does not fail to reveal in his innocence the society's expectation of a woman. He is brought up by his mother single handedly. The society is responsible for turning his mother into whom she is:

My mother had no formal education because she had spent her childhood looking after her father's cattle. Not that he could not afford to educate her; far from it. There was just no need to waste resources on someone who would only get married and become a housewife. All that was needed was to teach her how to serve her husband, look after babies and execute household chores (8-9).

The narrator is able to express some of the gender roles in the patriarchal society. Sending a girl to school was deemed a waste of resources since she would eventually get married. The woman would only be given lessons on how to take care of her home. It is ironical how this woman who had not seen the inside of a classroom was so keen on sending her only son to school. She did not want him to end up like her. The author articulates his feelings on the discrimination of the girl- child when he makes a statement that a girl had no right to inheritance. The expectations were that she would get married "fetch a handsome dowry and with luck, acquire land and wealth and elsewhere by virtue of marriage." (9). The society views the woman as some wealth provider from the dowry she is likely to fetch, and acquire wealth and land from wherever she gets married and not her father's home. Thus the narrator concludes: "Whoever came up with this wisdom either committed a gross oversight or was

outright selfish. Indeed, this was the height of male- chauvinism’’ (9). The young narrator is able to decipher that the discrimination on women was an act of selfishness from the men in the society. The young mind is able to figure out the injustice meted out on women. Perhaps this is what makes him exonerate his mother from any blame on his predicaments. The statement made here is a clear show of how undervalued the woman was in the society.

The marriage institution is portrayed as being on its death bed. The narrator states that; “The marriage institution was increasingly loosing salt with many a woman choosing to die single and divorce cases escalating every single day.’’ (9).The narrator feels that if women remained married, then the issue of inheritance would not be a bother to anyone. It is however unfortunate that divorce was on the increase hence the feeling of the weight of injustice on those women who found it difficult to get a place to put up once they got out of their marriages. This is an issue that impacts immensely on the women and ends up trickling down to the children. After his mother’s divorce, the narrator and his mother seek refuge at his grandmother’s place. He gives an insight on family relations as they were then. His uncles he says “were inherently traditional, because tradition gave them an upper hand in matters of inheritance’’ (9). The family does little to alleviate Muthini’s problems, since his mother after divorce is declared a *persona non grata* by her family.

The author seems to be poking holes at family relations in contemporary society. Family is supposed to be a pillar that offers support to its members but that is not the case with the narrator’s family. This further explains why Muthini is apprehensive when his grandmother after bringing him news of his mother’s death invites him to stay at her place over the holiday. He wonders whether he was more important than his mother who was not welcome home .He also wonders whether the grandmother was being sympathetic or remorseful. It does not take long before he realizes that nothing much had changed with his relatives, when

he goes home on holiday, he is treated with a lot of suspicion. The narrator makes it clear that his problems with his relatives are a spillover of what his mother underwent.

Muthini is not the only one whose family had wrangles, Alphonse Onsogo finds himself in an approved school after his father strangled the mother to death on allegations of infidelity. He wonders why his life had to take such a turn. Onsogo discloses to Muthini : “ You see, my mother and father were always trading insults and fighting. It did not make sense to me. They were supposed to be in love, right?”(31) The youth fail to understand why married people would be hurling insults at each other since they are supposed to be in love. To them the marriage institution is all about love. The break- ups are traumatizing to the young ones since Onsogo watched his mother being strangled. He feels that he was supposed to have a hope of a better future. The reader gets an insight of this through a dialogue between the narrator and Onsogo .This is a way passing a message that Muthini’s predicament is not unique to him since his age- mates have also under gone the same. The only explanation Muthini can give to his friends for his mother getting divorced by his father was her lack of education. It seems that the same society that denied the women a chance to education was also responsible for rejecting them for lack of it.

The author is making a statement on the fact that bad family relations have effects on the growing children as they tend to get disillusioned. Mugo’s vision is that children need to grow in a conducive environment for them to have a meaningful life. A child is said to be a product of the wider society therefore, that which is experienced by the older members of the society also trickles down to the child. The author is out to castigate those in the society who treat women like lesser beings. This does not only have an effect on the women, but also to their children. The author makes it clear that family relations have immense effects on a growing child.

### 2.2.1 Poverty

The narrator in Mugo's *Never Say Never* grew up in abject poverty. The author highlights this through the narrator and shows how the narrator negotiates through it. The narrator watches his mother go through the most difficult time in her life. She brings him up in most difficult circumstances. This almost makes her get to near depression and bitter with life. To fend for her family she acquired a piece of land at the public cemetery. To her dismay, she finds her crops harvested one day. To supplement the little the mother got from farming and sale of bananas at the market place, this narrator says: "we looked for menial jobs such as picking coffee, digging and weeding... The proceeds from our labour were too meagre to sustain us" (9-10). The narrator makes the reader share in his feelings as he watches his mother toil and moil to provide for her family. At an early age, he has to work to help his mother in supplementing the family income. However hard they try, the little they earn cannot sustain them. He clearly pin- points the kind of challenges he faced as he was growing up. It is not lost on him that his mother is in a state of depression. She blames everyone for 'our woes' and when her bitterness became 'colossal' she stopped talking to people. The narrator is able to feel with the mother because of the suffering she was undergoing.

The narrator is sent out of school for lack of building fund and this makes him disillusioned. He loses hope of ever seeing the inside of a classroom. He envies his cousin Patrick who seemed buoyant for the simple reason that he was in school. 'It was clear that I would never see the inside of a classroom again. My mother failed to raise the fee balance of Kshs.570. She was out of her depth and had resigned to our fate.'" (8). The author presents us with a situation where the narrator is in a state of disillusionment. The narrator has little to hope for in life. His yearning for an education is clearly evident. After spending fourteen days

in the remand home, he is informed that a school had been secured for him. “The news came as a relief I was going back to school!” (19). His joy is short-lived when he is taken to Getathuru Reception and Discharge Centre he says “we were not pupils but inmates. The fantasy of a school in the city died fast” (25). At the centre, life is unbearable. He uses an image of paradise in reference to Kiambiriria when he compares it with the centre. Mr. Maringa whose temper he earlier on compared to that of “a wounded rhino” is said to be “a harmless angel” when compared to the brutal inmates he encountered. After some stint at the discharge centre, Muthini finds himself at Kericho Approved School. It is all jubilation for the young boy who confesses to be wildly excited because his dreams had come true “Eventually I had a chance to get an education” (28). The narrator is able to fulfill his lifelong dream because of adapting a positive attitude towards life. His excitement at getting an education can tell it all. Despite the setback he encounters, he is able to persevere and eventually he is back in class.

In conclusion, the author makes a statement that poverty is a major drawback to many children who see their pursuit for an education get to an end. It is the reason why so many young adults in the contemporary Kenyan society are out of school. He therefore applauds those that are persevering in a bid to get what it is they desire for in life. The author uses this to give the reader an insight into how destructive poverty can be. The author castigates the society that has created the likes of Muthini’s mother who is on the verge of depression. The marriage institution is questioned. The fact that a husband can turn against the wife has created a society where children like Onsogo are disillusioned, when the future they are hoping to have gets elusive.



### **2.2.3 Romance and sexuality in young adults' novels**

Perhaps of concern to the young adults who are coming of age is how to relate with members of the opposite sex. Mugo, through the narrator presents us with incidences of this and how the young adults deal with the issue of sexuality. Innocent as he may be, Muthini has a crush on Anastasia way back in nursery school. He feels that she is the most beautiful girl in their class. These feelings are not lost on the reader when the narrator starts day dreaming about her in class. He compares her to “a well of joy whose company was a solution to sorrow, hunger and even death.” (96). The image of a well of joy shows the intensity of the attraction he had for her. Her company is enough to end his sorrows. Her absence makes him to miss her “like the desert misses the rain.” (97). The image of the desert and the rain serves to bring out the intensity of the feelings he has for Anastasia. Muthini is all too eager to please Anastasia who does not reciprocate his feelings. Just like others in the society, she judges him and forces him to admit to having stolen when in the actual fact he had not. This torments him. He keeps wondering why everyone had such a negative attitude towards him. He quips that he “needed to be seen for what I was, to be appreciated for my true worth” (106). This was a turning point in his life. He resolves never to ever try proving his innocence since it was proving difficult. Muthini knows the pain of rejection only too well. Innocent he may be, but no one is willing to give him a hearing.

Anastasia is all smitten with Jeff who comes from an affluent family. The narrator can do little but watch the love birds when he accompanies them on a trip after getting an invitation from his cousin Patrick. Muthini comes in as a voice of reason when Anastasia gets pregnant and comes to seek refuge from Patrick. He wonders why Patrick messed around with Anastasia if he did not have intentions of marrying her. Anastasia's morality is put to question when Patrick says ‘It seems every man was after her. A dozen men could be the

father of that child.”(145).The narrator takes it upon himself to ask his cousin who confesses of his recklessness with girls to go and have a HIV/AIDS test done. Later in the evening Jeff comes over to take Anastasia with him. He had initially evaded responsibility, but had come to his senses and decided to marry her. The author seems to suggest that those that engage in sexual relationships must be ready to take up their responsibilities. He voices an issue that most young adults take for granted; responsible sex. Those that engage in irresponsible sex should be ready to face the repercussions. Patrick is jittery when asked by Muthini to go take an HIV test. This is a wakeup call for those young adults who engage in reckless sex. The author sounds a warning for the likes of Patrick, Jeff and Anastasia as they should be ready to take up responsibilities. The young adults should not be lured into an easy life that makes them to regret later.

#### **2.2.4 Peer-pressure**

Peer pressure refers to the pressure to conform to the behaviours, attitudes and personal habits of a group. In a bid to get accepted in a group, young adults tend to conform to what others are doing. Young adults often feel a tremendous amount of pressure from their peer groups to modify their behavior in a way that is consistent with the expectations of the group. These group expectations can either demonstrate caring for each other and other members of society, or they can be more negative, requiring members to act in ways that they know are not morally correct providing the individual with an opportunity to choose. More often than not, young adults will influence each other either positively or negatively. In the approved school Muthini meets the likes of Mbiu, Onsongo and Karanchu.

The narrator confesses that the street-wise teachers had a larger following than the real teachers. Karanchu is one person he immensely admired because of his resourcefulness. He is ready to give him a solution that would help him win over Anastasia. Karanchu tells him that

he had something that could help him “fight shyness and be as confident as a lion” (99). The solution he is offered is in the form of Marijuana. The effects of the same are not lost on Muthini he says, “I heard of Marijuana and strange stories; of eating insatiably, of working tirelessly, of fighting, of running mad, of going bananas, and of becoming a zombie” (99). Despite the knowledge he has of the effects of the same, he is nudged on and takes a puff. To capture the effects Marijuana had on him, Muthini uses the image of wings. He gets an experience he has never had there before. It made him feel “like a Goliath” (100). He however comes to realize that the sensation was short-lived. He seems to be suggesting to the reader that however much they may wish to experiment with drugs, the effects could be adverse. He gets a wakeup call from those that mock him. He is driven into this because of the need to belong. He later comes to learn that taking marijuana could not help him portray “a different character” (106). Through this experience he makes a decision to do that which pleases him and not that which made others appreciate him. Muthini also comes to a realization that, “win or lose, I did not like his kind of wings. I simply had to believe in myself” (104). The author seems to be making a statement that the young adults can pull themselves out of a situation should they realize that whatever they are indulging in is not beneficial to them. Muthini though desperate to get accepted in the society, comes to realize that drugs were not a solution. So serious is he in his resolve that when his cousin Patrick tries to get him into taking some alcohol, he turns him down.

In conclusion, Mugo in choosing the first person narrator has engaged the reader who shares in the narrator’s suffering and his philosophy of life. Muthini takes up his mother’s policy and does not easily give up. The reader moves with him from an early age till the time he becomes of age. The capacity of the human being to evoke images of things or events not present, and never experienced or which may never have existed, is undoubtedly an important

element in art. "It is especially important...speech and verbal text (and)...is basic to any kind of verbal communication." (Louise Rosenblatt 1978, 32)

Mugo also makes use of images, or imagery, as a primary underlying structure in language, media, and mind. It is a basic element in communicating and creating, an integral part of thinking, speaking, listening, reading, and writing. "Language and images are inextricably linked -- in how we generate them, how we make meaning from them, how we use them, and how we remember them" (R. Fox). Images point to the nature of our human condition, to the experiences we remember, visualize and come to understand in the acts of reading and writing. Every detail of Muthini's life as he comes of age is reflected through images in the mind of the reader. These images are very striking and no reader can miss them from the powerful and evocative writing style that Mugo deploys in this novel.

The purpose of this section was to provide a detailed explanation on how and why the writing style of this author leads to an intense evocation of some themes as outlined in *Never Say Never*. I hope to elucidate and appreciate how imagery as a feature of style, in particular, works as a reflector and intensifier. Through the use of imagery and the first person narrator, the author is able to create a strong connection between his readers and the text.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FEMALE PROTAGONIST AS A ROLE MODEL FOR YOUNG ADULTS

#### 3.1 Introduction

Having looked at the presentation of the male character by Mugo in the previous chapter, I now explore the presentation of the female character by Mwangi in this chapter. I seek to explore how the author has portrayed the empowerment of his lead character in the novel. In their book, *Declarations of Independence: Empowered Girls in Young Adult Literature 1990-2001*, authors Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair offer a definition of empowered girls in YA ; They write that empowered girls are those who work,

“Within a web of network that constitutes a community, they make a place for themselves through meaningful contributions to it, nurturing others without sacrificing their own selves. They come to know themselves and they resist letting themselves be defined by others...They are courageous, enthusiastic and determined” (49)

According to them, empowered girls are those that are able to cut a niche for themselves and be defined for who they are and not by other people’s standards. They are selfless and ready to help others.

Growing up a female can be difficult and confusing for many young women. Being female is not only painful but dangerous. Literature offers a ground to understand the problem that affects the woman worldwide. Young people, and specifically girls, need representations of empowered young female protagonists who are brave, strong, and fierce. This representation

illustrates that readers can, too, hold those qualities and values deep inside them. The media constantly reminds us that girls live in a culture in which they are raped, beaten, and abused on a daily basis. Girls suffer high rates of depression, anxiety, and rejection. What the media does not frequently show us is that girls persevere. Girls shine bright even though they are faced with hardships. They triumph where others think they are not likely to.

In addition to examining powerful social structures that affect female character's experiences, this study examines how the young female protagonist explores her own power through acts of resilience and resistance, and how this can impact on the readers. Of concern in my study in this chapter is getting answers to the following questions;

- 1) How do female characters resist oppressive power?
- 2) How does the author portray female characters in the novel?
- 3) How do they voice their concerns in young adult literature?
- 4) What does empowerment and transformation mean to these characters?

In our society, young female adults are dealing with certain kinds of issues such as low self-esteem, cultural practices and rejection by members of the society that must be explored and resisted. Using young adult literature to present examples that illustrate alternatives to these oppressive issues can serve as one way to understand and eradicate them. By connecting with characters that are facing similar situations, young adults can find solace in the act of reading.

Exploration of empowerment and agency is specifically pertinent to this age group because the messages internalized in this time period are often long-lasting. In addition, exploration of empowerment and agency is especially relevant because even though many young women

experience feelings of low self-esteem, they also experience feelings of self-worth through this very transformation into their own subjectivities. Through literature illustrating the complexities of young women's experiences, girls are able to learn from these stories and simultaneously develop a stronger sense of self. This poses a responsibility for authors of young adult literature to recognize the potential effects of their work.

### **3.2 Chebet as a role model to young adults.**

Mwangi, in *The Delegate* uses as his protagonist, Chebet, who is portrayed as an independent, liberal, mature and strong girl. It is a story of a young girl's loss and how she has to undergo personal sacrifice. She rebels against the cultural practices of her community and succeeds against all odds.

The author portrays a young girl encumbered with responsibility at a very young age. The loss of her mother to colon cancer due to poverty propels her into the world of adulthood in that she has to take care of her siblings to fulfill her mother's death wish. She also tells her to quit school and get married. Her uncle Norbert was to see to it that she got initiated first. After the mother is buried, Chebet has to think of ways of providing for her siblings. She gets a job in the quarry where her father used to work and promises her siblings that they would go on with their education while she worked. This is the sacrifice she has to make. This does not come to be when the uncle goes accompanied by the old man who was to marry her to pick her from her home and take her back to her uncle's home. Despite her protests, Chebet's uncle is still bent on having her circumcised and later marrying her off. Chebet resolves to escape and go to Nairobi to search for a job as a house help. Her first day in the city is a nightmare when she loses all she had. An old man who offers her a place to stay for the night, assists her to get a job from his boss. Rosemary offers her job to assist Roselita, an elderly

woman who was working for her. Chebet's stay in the home is short lived as she gets dismissed without pay, after breaking a set of plates at a party in the house. She gets so traumatized by the experience and resolves to travel back to Marigat. Roselita takes her to church and introduces her to the Father Joachim who listens to her story and promises to help her and her siblings. Through Father Joachim's help, Chebet and her two brothers are admitted in Mother of Hope Children's Home. He also admits them to St Claire Primary School where the church will pay for their education. For Chebet, her dream of getting educated had finally been realized. She engrosses herself in school work and together with her brothers they shine in school. The narrative ends at an optimistic note when she is made a delegate for Children at the United Nations conference in Geneva Switzerland. Mwangi therefore takes the reader through the life of Chebet who almost gives up her dreams but later gets a second chance.

The way Chebet handles situations in her life is what makes her admirable. Her peers will get inspiration from it. After the death of her mother, she has to contend with her uncle Norbert who sees her as some source of wealth, and is out to ensure that he carries out her mother's death wish.

“I have told you! We are not discussing it and this must be done” he recovered in the time respond furiously and loudly ‘After you heal, we shall start the negotiations .You will be married to Mr. Kipyeno by the time you approach....” (27).

Norbert, a man who is out to give orders which must be obeyed, wants Chebet to undergo circumcision after which she would get married to Mr. Kipyeno. The uncle does not expect any questions from Chebet. Tradition demands that a girl should not question the orders that are given by elders. Chebet does not however, take this lying down .She defies her uncle and



tells him “No! I won’t do any of those things. You better kill me,” (27). She resolves to go to look for job at the quarry to enable her take care of her brothers .The author seems to be of the opinion that though young, a girl has a right to make choices on what is of benefit to her. She does not have to sit back and take orders and blindly do what she is asked to; there is need to voice her feelings. She articulates that she would prefer death to being forced to undergo the cut and later get married. She may not really comprehend the dangers of the practice to her but she decides to fight it.

A research conducted by WHO (World Health Organization) in 1996 states that Female genital mutilation involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. This practice poses a risk to the health and well being of girls and women and is a violation of internationally accepted human rights. The Children’s Act that was passed in Kenya in 2001 described girls who are likely to be forced into being circumcised as being in need of the special care and protection of the state. It also provided for courts to take action against the perpetrators. However, the practice still continues although there has been a slight decline in rates. The communities that practice it claim that it is the gateway to adulthood. A girl who undergoes the rite is ripe for marriage .Chebet knows this too well hence the decision to escape. She recalls the words of a woman who had come to her school and urged the girls to shun early marriages and female genital mutilation. She further urges them to concentrate on education.

Chebet’s determination is further exemplified when she decides that she has had enough of the suffering in the hands of her uncle and therefore decides to travel to Nairobi to go look for job. She gets to the city a totally confused and lost girl .She loses all she had and does not seem to understand why blood is flowing from her private parts. Her naivety is further

exemplified when she imagines that it was the ride on the motorcycle that made her bleed. The author chooses an innocent and naïve protagonist to act as the propeller of his story. Her ignorance on the changes taking place in her body provides further insight on her innocence and it could be the author's way of raising a pertinent issue on sexuality which young girls find difficult to comprehend. The author is making a statement on the responsibilities that parents ignore at times. They need to inform their daughters about changes that are bound to take place in their bodies. The question lingering in the readers mind should be; if the young girl hardly comprehends the body changes in her, how is she going to handle marriage? The author is castigating those cultural practices and the perpetrators of the same who seem blind to the woes of those they force into them. The loss she suffers at a early age does not make her succumb to her uncle's wishes .She is a source of hope to her siblings, Daniel and Julius, who look up to her as a parent figure.

Though she has grown up in poverty, Chebet hopes that this is not going to be her life forever. She is optimistic that things are bound to change. Her disillusionment is witnessed when she gets into the city; "She felt tired .The hope she had was now gone; she did not know where life was headed .The future was as bleak as the approaching night was dark."(63). She uses the image of darkness to show how much hopeless she was. For her, the future seems bleak. At her point of desperation, she questions 'if there was a god for children and the suffering'' (63).The question one asks is whether there is any hope in her life. The young girl's life is riddled with confusion and frustrations. She hardly knows the city and she feels weighed down by the fact that she had gone against her mother's wish. Even in her hopeless state she does not forget her brothers, the situation highlight her resilience. She does not sit back and pity herself. Her future maybe bleak, but she does not surrender that easily.

Chebet's view of the twilight girls is brought out when she encounters them at Koinange street in Nairobi; to her the whole episode of cat walking seductively whenever a vehicle appeared was scandalous and the made her ashamed (79) .She does not get to mouth this but whatever is flowing in her mind helps the reader know her mind set. This illustrates her world view of those girls that engage in prostitution .This is not something that one would be proud of .The old man who had offered her a place to stay over the night further urges her:

“No matter the problem you may face, never ever dream of doing what these girls do... their actions degrade them so much and they lose their dignity for money. It will feel good to succeed in activities that you can proudly tell people about. If you can tell people about your success story without any guilt or shame, then you have a nice story. But if you succeed through evil schemes, then your story can only be told in shame and guilt. Let your story be a genuine one” (81-82)

The old man acts as a moral judge and to educate Chebet on the need to uphold her morality. He feels that engaging in prostitution is degrading oneself. However much one becomes successful through engaging in prostitution, the story one gives will always be riddled with guilt. The statement the old man seems to be making here is that one cannot be termed as being successful because of engaging in evil schemes. Success is measured by how genuine one's story is.

Prostitution is a highly stigmatised occupation within the Kenyan cultural context. Cultural attitudes towards sex work and sex workers are predominantly negative and conservative. Prostitution is categorized as an offence against morals; a threat to the moral fabric of the society and a nuisance under the Kenyan law. The frequent arrests of women who law enforcers consider to be immorally dressed, bolsters the negative social perception of

prostitutes. In Kenya, any woman found out late at night or walking along certain streets or wearing short or revealing clothes will be arrested and charged with prostitution. Some people don't think much of prostitutes. They think that they are all drug addicts who spread diseases. This may be true in some cases, but many are just trying to make a living and are very clean. Most are driven into it because of poverty. When the old man jokingly tells one of the girls to induct Chebet into the job, she confesses, "It's not the best of work" (80). This is an indicator that those engaged in it are not proud of whatever they do and are not too keen on recruiting innocent girls like Chebet into it. It is against this background that the author uses the old man as an embodiment of reason. He urges Chebet not to let poverty make her degrade herself. The old man does not castigate the prostitute who leaves her clothes in his custody. His words however, are an eye-opener on his feelings towards the immoral character.

The author uses the old man's interaction with Chebet as a way of discussing his view on prostitution. The author points out that this is not the way to go no matter the circumstances. Chebet swears never to become a prostitute, a call that should be taken up by other girls who are faced with a similar predicament. The author makes a statement through Chebet, when she vows never to become a prostitute. The fact that she views prostitution as being scandalous and shameful is reason enough for those readers of Chebet's age to follow suit and take a firm stand.

Chebet's encounter with Rosemary does a lot to shed light on poor parenting. Rosemary thinks that providing for her children is all there is to parenting. Rosemary is detached from her children and leaves the work of bringing them up to the house-help. The author introduces Rosemary who is a sharp contrast of Roselita, her house-help, to show that money is not all that counts in the world. A loving heart and desire to assist others is what is needed.

Rosemary gets punished for her arrogance when her children are kidnapped and one of them, Jeff, ends up getting killed, while Roselita gets rewarded for her kindness when she accompanies Chebet to the Children's conference in Geneva. The two women's interaction with the protagonist assists in shaping her world view. From Rosemary, Chebet learns that there is more to life than money while from Roselita she learns about the virtue of humility and being big- hearted. Roselita offers Chebet a base on which she builds her future.

Just like the old man Chebet met on her first day in the city, Roselita becomes a source of inspiration. She also plays a great role in educating Chebet and the young adults in the contemporary Kenyan society. "What will make you stand upright and be respected is how you will treat and honour your womanhood .Respect it and do not even allow boys to play around with your body'' (110).Roselita's words keep ringing in Chebet's mind. This forms a base for her in that she learns to respect her womanhood. When her friend Grace tries to lure her into a relationship with Jeff, she recalls Roselita's words, "Somebody can stop you from achieving your goals. But you have the choice to stop something or somebody from doing that'' (152). She resolves not to let friends distract her from what she was doing.

Chebet's world- view changes through the wise counsel of the older characters she gets to interact with. The author uses them intentionally to act as instructors to the young mind. Chebet promises to follow the advice they give her. This is what keeps her fire burning. The two act as pillars that strengthen her resolve on the importance of remaining morally up right.

When accorded a chance to continue with her education by Father Joachim, Chebet is all appreciative. The three children turn out to be so bright. The church plays a great role in moulding the lives of the destitute children.

The author also uses Chebet as a source of inspiration to others. She keeps telling her story to others who get touched. This gives her the strength to forge on. Of special interest was a note she received from a member of the congregation she had addressed:

I have suffered for a couple of years with diabetes. My suffering had reached an end and I had given up. But when I heard your story today all that changed, I hated myself for losing hope and becoming a loser as you said. Your words, however, transformed me and since then, I have gained hope to live. I have realized there are better things ahead, just like you have a bright future ahead for never giving up. Your determination will uplift people. True to your words, young talented girl, every dark dawn has a morning. (148).

To this woman Chebet would forever remain a role- model. She had taught her the importance of not losing hope. The image of the ‘dark dawn’ which always has a morning is used to sensitize the reader on the importance of never giving up. There is always hope for a better future. What the woman found to be the end of the tether turned out to be small compared to Chebet’s predicaments. Chebet is not only an inspiration to her age mates but also to the older generation. Her endurance helps shape other people’s life. The author makes a statement through her that one should not always keep whining about misfortunes but one should learn from others and keep going.

The author presents Chebet with situations that she has to deal with diligently. She too experiences pressure from her peers who would wish to have her experiment on love matters. Her words to Grace, Bobby and Ken should not just be ignored. She categorically tells them that she knew what she wanted in life and did not need such friends to help her get there(152). The author uses her to make a statement that one can say no to peer pressure.

Though faced with blackmail from Grace she seems to have made up her mind not to succumb.

In conclusion, the author presents the reader with a girl who is focused and will stop at nothing to achieve her life's desires. The author applauds Chebet's resilience and uses her to make a statement to those in her age bracket and beyond. The protagonist in the selected novel suffers from cultural crises, yet exemplifies sources of hope and admiration. Readers might relate to the character, definitely learn from her, and some will realize they are not alone. Though the young woman in this novel face a number of obstacles in her life, she is shown as having grown through them and changed. She does not let the people around her hold her back from new experiences or from achieving her goals. She actively seeks out the way out of her predicaments and does not sit idling about, letting others take charge of her life. The novel portrays a young woman who is strong and actively involved in shaping her future.

### **3.3 Narrative aspect in Edward Mwangi's *The Delegate***

Narration is an important aspect in any story telling. The author, depending on the message that needs to be passed across, chooses the narrative perspective he deems fit. Mwangi chooses to use the omniscient narrator. The third person narrator gives the world view of the narrative. In this case the narrator is a non-character who acts as an observer, whose job is to comment and describe the events in the story. An aesthetic distance is interposed between the reader and the story by the third person narrator. The narrative told in this perspective can be viewed as an authorial narrative. The narrator is entirely absent from the plot development and acts as a peripheral observer. This narrator presents the story overtly from an outsider's stance. The superior position often allows him to access a characters consciousness and

knowledge about the ongoing events. ‘The story might be narrated in the third person by a detached, invisible narrator whose “omniscience” facilitates privileged access to the thoughts and feelings of individual characters’ (Simpson 27). This is what makes it easy for the reader to interrogate what is going on in the mind of the characters and further helps in understanding the issues raised by the author. A narrative told by the third person narrator is referred to as a heterodiegetic narrative. This is because the narrator is situated outside the story and as such is detached from the events of the story. The third person narrator gives a world view of the story. This narrator looks into the many characters in the story and the broader background of a story. This narrator acts as a non – character but rather is an observer, who describes and comments on the goings on in the story. The third person narration interposes what is called the aesthetic distance between the reader and the story. The third person narrator chosen gives the reader an insight into Chebet’s life. The reader is able to have a glimpse of what is in Chebet’s mind and her reactions to various aspects.

Moreover, to give credence to what the characters exposed through the use of the third person narrator go through, the writer makes use of dialogue and internal monologue. Dujardin (2004), defines interior monologue as “the uninterrupted flow of thoughts going through the character's being, as they are born, and in the order they are born, without any explanation of logical sequence and giving the impression of 'raw' experience” (Jahn 89). Therefore, both techniques capture what the characters think or say. As Bakhtin (1973) argues, when “an inner thought of a particular character is transformed into an utterance, dialogical relations spontaneously occur between this utterance and the utterance of imagined others” (Ways 46). Thus there is a close relationship of what characters say and what goes on in their mind. The exposed thoughts reflect on the repressed ideas.



The Characters search for the meaning of their lives through dialogue. These dialogues are, “a source of hope and feelings of safety, a way to give sense to life” (Waysl 49). Tormented by anxiety and unable to rescue themselves from fixed positions such as perpetual poverty and alienation or delusions, characters try to find a solution to them both in their mind and interaction with other characters. They attempt to answer: What should I do now? What will happen? What are the ways out of these problems? Through use of the two stylistic devices,, a number of concerns are raised.

### **3.3.1 Poverty**

Chebet is a product of the 2007 post election violence to which she loses her father and her mother the family’s breadwinner is diagnosed with severe colon cancer. She is forced to feed her mother from what they got from the feeding program run by the Kenya Red Cross Society. “Chebet and her siblings hid some food which they took to their bedridden mother....It was too little but enough to keep her alive” (2).This portrays the state of desperation the family is in. Food is not available in their home and hence they have to rely on the school feeding program to keep their mother alive. She is ridiculed by her classmates who wonder why she studies so hard, yet the mother cannot afford to take her to secondary school. Chebet has to bear all this but fights to keep her mother alive. The author portrays the effect of the post election violence by telling the story of Chebet. Children might not have been able to voice their feelings but they suffered silently. Having lost the father to the violence and with a bed ridden mother, Chebet is thrust into the life of an adult so early in life. Poverty is what they thrive in.

Hunger is not the only thing that bothers young Chebet, school uniform was also a problem “Her equally old and torn green pullover stuck to her patched green dress. Her mother had mended it several times for they could not afford new school uniforms” (8).Chebet

appreciates the fact that her mother patched up the uniform. The fact that she wore torn uniform did not deter Chebet from her studies. The narrator makes it clear that to them shoes were not a necessity and it never bothered them either. What seems to bother Chebet more is her mother's health. In a dialogue between Chebet and her younger brother, the children articulate that their life would have been better if their father was alive. Julius wonders whether the father was killed for having stolen from anyone. To his young mind, a person only dies for committing a crime. The author seems to be questioning the senseless killings during the post election violence.

Chebet's community relies on food donations from the government for survival. A number of people however, succumbed to death because the donations were made after every three weeks or a month. The author criticizes the government that keeps promising that no people would die from hunger and yet people continued to die because what is given is inadequate. The omniscient narrator takes us into Chebet's mind when she wonders "They died even when parts of the country had more than enough maize- So much that it went bad. Potatoes and cabbages were rotting in some parts of the country." (25). The young girl does not fail to decipher the irony of the situation, that while some people were dying of hunger, others were busy throwing away the food. The author poses a question on the disparities that are there in the country. In as much as environmental degradation can be blamed for some of the catastrophes, the government should also come in and try to assist the citizenry. To the young mind, it is the high time the government took up its responsibility.

To fend for her siblings, Chebet is forced to work in a quarry for a meagre pay of ten shillings for every twenty kilograms of stones crushed. The ugly side of child- labour is highlighted. Poverty, however, is the driving force behind this. In Kenya, many children are forced to take up jobs in the agricultural sector, others as domestic helps while others are engaged in mining

to supplement the family income. Worse still, others are forced to begin the streets. When Chebet goes to rescue her brothers after getting assistance from Father Joachim, the narrator points out that Father Joachim was shocked to see women and children crushing stones. Chebet's aunt however is quick to inform him that they needed to work there to earn money. The narrator explores the ugliness of child labour through the use of the omniscient narrator who is able to decipher Father Joachim's feelings, "Father Joachim was shocked to see children crushing stones" (134). The shock registered from Father Joachim only serves to problematize the issue of child labour that many have chosen to ignore. He further lays blame on the government that leaves its people to suffer. Poverty has driven them into taking desperate measures to ensure that they survive.

Apart from having children engaging in manual labour to fend for themselves, there are those who will opt for prostitution. On her first night in Nairobi, Chebet encounters women parading themselves on Koinange Street. She views this act as "scandalous" and "felt ashamed" By giving us Chebet's sentiments about the issue, the author raises a serious issue of morality. She makes a decision there and then and vows never to become a prostitute. The question that nubs her mind is "Why lose dignity this much?"(81). To her, engaging in prostitution makes one lose dignity. The author chooses to use an elderly character to impact societal expectations on Chebet. The words the old man chooses to use greatly impacts on Chebet. "I know you are facing serious problems particularly after losing your parents at your age.... Live with your dignity, my daughter. Its loose morals that lower someone's dignity not poverty". (82) The old man is used as a voice of reason for young Chebet who is confused about the life the girls lead on the streets. The old man makes it clear that it is loose morals that lower one's dignity and not poverty. Poverty should not be reason enough to make one turn immoral. The author makes a statement to the young readers that poverty should not be an excuse for one to engage in some morally unacceptable behavior.

In conclusion, though the author has highlighted poverty as one of the problems that Chebet has to deal with, he uses this as a platform to raise a number of social concerns. He makes a statement that poverty should not be reason for one to engage in socially deviant behavior. There are options for instance taking up a job as a house- help which is more dignified than prostitution.

### **3.3.2 Hypocrisy**

Hypocrisy in the society especially on matters of death is brought to the fore by the writer. The author makes this statement through letting the reader get into Chebet's mind. The relatives were not there for them when their mother was sick but they flock to her home when she dies.

She shook her head as she held the arm of her brother and led him to an empty seat at the back of the tent. She did not like the pitiful look on the faces of the people who had attended the burial of her mother. They all looked so concerned, including the relatives who came in large numbers and acted generous at the home. She knew they were all pretending; she could not rely on any of them for assistance. Though most of her relatives were poor, the well-off among them had promised to assist them when they lost their father. After their father's burial everything came to an end and none came to check on them. When their mother fell sick, none came let alone take her to hospital. (13-14).

Chebet at her age is able to see through the people and those relatives that have come to attend the mother's burial. She sees through their pretence, since they had abandoned them way before the mother died. They will make all sorts of promises after the departure of a

loved one but will never fulfill those promises. They had promised to help them after the death of their father but help was not forthcoming. Innocent as she may be, Chebet has been able to study the relatives and has come to learn that the pitiful looks on their faces are all a facade. She scoffs at the pretence displayed by the mourners who turn up in large numbers to bury the mother but had not found time to visit her when she was sick.

With the death of her mother, her desperation is highlighted. She recalls the words of one of her favorite teachers “The sun will never shine and the morning will never dawn” (14). The sun represents the hopes and aspirations she had in life. In the absence of the sun ever shining, there would never be a dawn. The image of the sun that will never shine serves to express her disillusionment.

During the mother’s burial, Chebet’s disgust cannot be hidden as she listens to speaker after speaker; she “felt sick of everyone” (18). She knew that they were lying since they hardly visited them when her mother was sick. She “sneered unconsciously” (18). as the man meant to be her future husband talked of how he was going to assist the children. “Bitterness and wrath boiled inside her while her stomach rumbled loudly and her legs trembled” (18). The writer wants to communicate how corrosive hypocrisy can be. The intensity of Chebet’s feelings can only be illustrated in the words the writer chooses to use. The author uses this incidence to castigate the hypocritical behavior in members of the society.

### **3.3.3 Gender relations and roles**

The need to evaluate gender relations and roles comes up in Mwangi’s *The Delegate*. While gender relations refers to how men and women relate in the society, gender roles refers to the duties and responsibilities of men and women in the society. The need for women to be viewed as equals by their husbands has an adverse effect on the family set up. Rosemary is

ever busy and hardly spares time to be with her husband and three children. The writer picks on her friend to advise her about parents who lack time to be with their children as the children lack “models to emulate and get confused as far as their sexual and psycho-social development is concerned” (87). She has her doubts about this but not even her relatives are willing to stay with her children who she has very little influence over. The writer wants to make a statement on responsible parenting. Roselita’s voice adds to Chebet’s knowledge on the societal expectations of a good parent. The author’s world view is also brought out. The author admonishes those parents that are too busy for their children. He admonishes those women that are too keen on being equal to men at the expense of their children. Rosemary hardly has time for her children and it is reason enough why her children grow up spoiled. Roselita points out; “Their parents are so busy that they do not have time for them. What has happened? The children are deformed in character and they can do and say anything “(p.102). This seems to echo what Rosemary had been told by her friend but chose to ignore. The writer posits that parents should create time for their children less they become unmanageable.

The writer contrasts Rosemary with Roselita on matters of parenting. Roselita feels indebted for not spending time with her children when her husband ensures that they separate. She sheds light on the fact that many marriages were breaking because of money. This is what had made her get separated with her children.

The third person narrator in this case is able to mingle with other characters and highlight their sentiments on certain issues which in turn expand the author’s vision and mission. Mwangi is making a statement that women should be ready to take up their roles as mothers and be responsible as such.

### 3.3.4 Cultural practices

According to a research conducted by WHO (World Health Organisation) dubbed *Giving up Harmful Practices, Not Culture*(1996) states that in every culture, important practices exist which celebrate life-cycle transitions, perpetuate community cohesion, or transmit traditional values to subsequent generations. These traditions reflect norms of the society and behaviour based on age, life stage, gender, and social class. While many traditions promote social cohesion and unity, others erode the physical being and integrity of individuals, particularly girls and women. Factors such as limited access to education, information, and services allow those that may be most harmful to persist.

It further states that harmful traditions exist in many different forms, but they share origins in the historically unequal social and economic relationships between men and women. Female genital cutting, early marriage and childbearing, and gender bias have received global attention due to their severe, negative impact on the health and well-being of females. Efforts to alter or eradicate these practices are often met with suspicion or hostility from those communities practicing them, particularly when efforts originate from outside the community. For many members of these societies, ending their traditions is unimaginable; as such practices constitute an integral part of the socio-cultural fabric.

The narrator presents Chebet's quest for education. She is bent on getting educated to enable her help the marginalized girls in her community. At her mother's funeral, she remembers her final words in which she had urged her to quit school and get married. Chebet's mother is presented as the conservative type that would want to uphold the culture of her people. Chebet's feelings about this are brought out in an interior monologue that she has: "Girls her age got married to old men who paid dowry-goats and cows-to their families...that is why parents gladly married off their daughters from the age of twelve"(15-16).The whole issue of

marriage is based on the amount of wealth a family gets. To Chebet, the girl is an item for sale and this is what motivated most parents to marry off their children at an early age. It is made clear that “She never thought much of these rituals for she was not planning to observe them” (16). This is a clear show that the views of the young generation and the older generation on the cultural practices do vary. There is a high probability that the young generation is not ready to uphold those cultural practices they deem not useful. When her uncle insists on marrying her off, she feels that her dream was now going down the drain.

Aspects of the people’s culture are brought out in a dialogue between Chebet and her uncle. When Chebet offers to go work in the quarry to fend for her siblings, the uncle says that the job could not raise enough money to sustain the family. He informs her on the need to fulfill the dictates of her community by undergoing circumcision and then getting married to Mr. Kipyeno. Chebet is not ready to undergo the process and tells this to the uncle. “No! I won’t do any of those things. You better kill me,” (27). Chebet is defiant and is ready to die other than get married. She is an example of the young girls who will not sit back and follow the dictates of their traditions blindly. The dialogue helps in understanding the view of the young adults on the cultural practices that are deemed as being important by the elder generation. There is a great divide between the two. Chebet voices that which many in her age group are not able to. Chebet recalls the words of a woman who had visited them in school and had asked them to shun female genital mutilation and early marriages. She only knew too well that succumbing to her uncle’s demands means the end of the road for her in education. The lady lays emphasis on the need for education as it is the key to putting to an end those cultural practices that pulled back the girl child. Chebet vows to pursue to the bitter end. The author uses her voice to give voice to those others who may find themselves in a similar situation. He uses Chebet to make a statement that not all directives from the elder



members of the society should be followed. He impresses upon the young girls to shun those practices that are not beneficial to them.

To articulate the ugly side of early marriages, the author presents the reader with the case of Grace, Chebet's aunt, who had been married at thirteen. She gave birth a year later though the baby does not survive. "She had always regretted that and wished she could turn back her life and say no to that" (73). Grace regrets the turn of events in her life. She feels an outcast in her home. Her husband does nothing to alleviate her pain, since he ran to the other wives. Her reproductive system gets affected and had no control of her bladder. Grace suffers silently and does not wish to have anybody else undergo the same. She is therefore happy when Chebet defies her uncle and runs away.

By highlighting Grace's predicament and her views on early marriage, the author is making a statement that not all cultural practices should be embraced. He further comments that not all from the older generation are ready to embrace the cultural practices deemed as important in their community, after having known the consequences. This probably is a pointer that with time, these practices are bound to be done away with.

Chebet's younger brother, Denis voices a concern that could be the concern of many young boys in his community; He wonders why it is the girls who get married early and not the boys. Maybe it is the author's way of putting across the message that it is likely that the younger generation will take a different stand on matters of early marriage. Chebet's dilemma is seen when she wonders why the mother had to die. She is torn between getting married and fulfilling her dreams of getting an education.

In conclusion, the writer through the use of a number of stylistic devices has been able to raise a number of concerns. The reader is let into the feelings and emotions of the characters presented in the novel. Through the use of these the author has succeeded in articulating his vision.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE MALE AND FEMALE PROTAGONIST AS TREND SETTERS FOR THE YOUNG KENYAN ADULTS

In order to fully appreciate the impact young adults' literature has on the contemporary young adults in Kenya, it is necessary to compare and contrast aspects in Mugo's *Never Say Never* and Mwangi's *The Delegate* and how the protagonists negotiate round the challenges they encounter. Whereas there is a difference in the way the writers have presented the challenges of the young adults in contemporary Kenya, similarities lay in how the protagonists deal with these challenges.

The young adults in Kenya in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are presented as being more resilient and focused. The two authors focus on the young adults as protagonist in their novels. Muthini and Chebet lose their parents at an early age and have to negotiate through the challenges in life with little or no assistance from the surviving relatives. The two encounter predicament after predicament but just when they are about to give up, help comes and their stories end at an optimistic note. The loss of the parents at an early age is a characteristic of the young adult literature so that the reader focuses on the young adult character according to Donelson and Nielsen (2001)

Chebet loses her father to the post election violence following a disputed presidential election in 2007, while her mother dies of colon cancer. As for Muthini, little is said about his father apart from the fact that he divorced his mother before he was born because she was not educated. His mother on the other hand passed on when he was in primary school, precisely,

Kericho Approved School. While Chebet takes it upon herself to fend for her siblings at an early age after she realizes that the extended family was not out to help them after the death of her mother, Muthini's mother passes on when he is in school and the only thing that seems to bother him is how he would cope with the loss of the only person who ever cared for him. The effects of post election violence on children are thus explored. Perhaps of major concern is the break from the norm in the African tradition where the extended family would see to it that the young ones left behind by their parents were taken care of. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century individualism has set in and this is why Chebet looks for odd jobs to take care of her siblings, while Muthini has to live with relatives who make him feel unwelcome. The social fabric that held members of a family together seems to have been broken.

The two are involved in child labour at some point in their life. Muthini when sent out of school has to assist his mother in the menial jobs she took up to supplement the little she was able to raise from selling bananas at the market and farming at the cemetery. Chebet has to drop out of school and goes to work in a quarry after her mother dies. This she does to ensure that she puts some food on the table for her siblings. When faced with the threat of getting married off by the uncle, Chebet escapes and goes to Nairobi to work as a house help. All this she does to fulfill the mother's death wish. The two authors present the readers with the two young adults who are ready to do all it takes to cope with the situations they come across in life. They are not afraid of taking up menial jobs and other odd jobs to move on with life.

For the two protagonists a strong desire for education is their driving force. The two novels are therefore set in school. This is an environment that many young adults are familiar with. Muthini gets frustrated when Mr. Maringa, the headmaster at Kiambiriria, sends him out of school at class four for failure to raise ksh.570. He is disillusioned at the thought of never seeing the inside of a classroom. Salvation however, comes his way when some men "arrest"

him and promise to take him to school. He does not go through his dream kind of school, but he takes in to books and finally acquires a grade that will see him get to the university. Chebet on the other hand offers to drop out of school and get a job to ensure that her brothers go to school after the demise of their mother. This is a sacrifice she has to make though deep inside her; she has the strong desire to learn. She envies Rosemary's children who go to school while she is left working in the house. Her dream is however realized when Roselita takes her to Father Joachim who promises to take her siblings and her to school. Chebet sees education as the key out of marginalization in her community. Getting educated would enable her assist the girls in her community who do not have a voice against the oppressive traditions. For Muthini education makes him get accepted in the society that had initially rejected him. The two get a fulfillment when they get back to school. Thus the philosophy of the two authors is realized when the two novels end in an optimistic note.

The plot of the story reveals similarities in the storyline. The difference lies in the details. The major difference is that Chebet highlights issues that are unique to the girl- child, who is marginalized, while Mugo deals with challenges faced by boys as they grow. Furthermore the two novels look at how each character interacts with others and how they get influenced by those around them. Muthini mostly interacts with his age mates, while Chebet interacts with adults. While Muthini is presented as the wiser one among his peers, and constantly serves as their voice of reason, Chebet interacts with adults who act as her advisers. The adults take up the duties of teaching the young girl more so on issues of morality. Chebet draws a lot from the adults that surround her. The old man she meets at Koinange Street is not given a name. He represents the voice of the older generation who should take up the role of guiding the youth. Chebet's interaction with Rosemary and Roselita, the two contrasting women shape her life in different ways. From Rosemary, aspects of poor parenting are highlighted, while from Roselita a mother figure that Chebet never got a chance to grow up with, she gets some

wise counsel. Roselita demystifies for her the changes that are taking place in her body and warns her against playing with boys. The fact that Chebet listens to their wise counsel and does not choose to ignore them is a lesson other girls should take up.

The titles of the novels highlight the authors' vision. The title *Never Say Never* is a portrayal of what propels the main character who is asked by his mother to "fight like a wounded lion and never say never". She tells him that her desire was for him to acquire education so as not to end up like her. His mother seems to suggest that if she had had an opportunity to learn, life would have been different. Despite the many problems he experiences in his quest for education, despite being treated like some outcast by his age mates and relatives, his mother's words propel him to success. Even as he moves from one institution to the other, the words act as his guiding principle. He has to contend with a society that condemns him, rejection from friends and relatives.

*The Delegate* is used in reference to Chebet, who struggles through life and earns herself the title as she goes to represent her country as a United Nations delegate for children. She earns this title from a narrative she composes and represents the Nairobi County at the national level. In it she captures the need for responsible parenting. She urges parents to nurture the children they are blessed with and not to leave the responsibility of bringing up the children to house girls. She urges the church to take up its responsibility of being the moral compass and authority in the society. She reminds the state that all children are equal, and to the children, the message is that they need to make responsible choices and are urged to look at the future with hope and determination. Moreover, she asks them to shun anything that will come between them and their growth. This story earns her trip to Geneva, Switzerland, as a delegate representing Africa in the United Nations Children's Conference. The content of Chebet's narrative portrays a young generation that is responsive to what is happening around

them. The author seems to suggest that the young adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are willing to make an about turn in the way they make decisions and also in taking responsibility for their actions. The elder members of the society need to borrow a leaf from the young adults.

Peer pressure is another major concern raised in the two novels. In the Approved schools, Muthini is influenced by his age mates. Some peers can be positive and supportive while others can be negative and destructive. In class eight, Muthini and his class mates decide to approach their Mathematics teacher to ask him to give them extra tuition in Mathematics since they needed to perform well. The whole group does extremely well and ends up getting places in secondary school. This is an example of positive influence. The likes of Karanchu and Mbiru are examples of friends who influence Muthini negatively. Karanchu convinces him to take Marijuana to help him get accepted by girls while Mbiru makes him take bread on Mr. Keya's account, in a shop where the teacher used to pick items on credit. Muthini however comes to a realization that taking drugs does not get one accepted in the community. He rises above his age mates and is able to weigh his options and take a stand on doing that which is right and shunning that which is not beneficial. The author seems to be making a statement that a young adult is responsible for the decisions he makes. One needs not indulge in drug abuse and blame it on the friends. One can pull out of the ensnarement of peers.

Chebet's way of dealing with peer pressure is different from that of Muthini. She does not allow her friend to drag her into experimenting in relationships with the opposite sex. She tells her that she is focused and is not ready to allow anything to distract her. Thus for Chebet, getting accepted by friends is not paramount for her; she would rather stay focused on whatever she has set her mind on. It does not take long before Agnes, a girl who was at the Children's home with Chebet, is sent home after she is found guilty of misbehaving with Bobby one of the boys at the Home. Chebet clearly tells them that they are lost when they try

recruiting her into the group. Chebet stands out from the group and does not wish to be dragged along blindly by her peers. Mwangi seems to be making a statement that the young adults in Kenya have choices to make. The need to belong to a certain group should not be reason enough for one to make regrettable decisions.

Poverty is a major concern raised by the two authors. The way the two protagonists deal with it is however different. Muthini becomes a laughing stock for his age mates because of wearing patched up clothes to school. This does not bother him much. What bothers him is the school headmaster who keeps throwing him out of school because of the building fund arrears. This is what finally gets him out of school. He watches as his mother sinks to near depression as she tries to bring him up. He gets resigned to fate, till the day he is bundled up in a van and taken to a series of Approved schools. Chebet on the other hand has to feed her ailing mother with the food given to them in school by the Red Cross. Just like Muthini she is ridiculed by her classmates because of carrying food for her mother from school. They also taunt her because of working hard in class yet her mother would not afford to take her to secondary school. Her uniform is torn and patched up and she goes to school bare feet. The two however negotiate around their problems as they do not let the problems they encounter to hold them back. Muthini neither blames his mother nor his extended family for his woes. He uses every opportunity he gets to better himself. He is proud of his mother and does not fail her. He lives to make her proud when he overcomes all hurdles and becomes the top student in his school in the national exam.

Though Chebet defies her mother's orders of getting circumcised and getting married, she lives up to her promise of getting help for her brothers. She excels in school and becomes a source of inspiration to many. The ridicule the two get only serves to strengthen them. This should be a wakeup call for the young adults who give up in life and blame poverty for all



their problems. The two protagonists are proof enough that poverty should not be a hindrance to a person who is focused in life.

The two authors use different narrative techniques in telling their narratives. While Mugo chooses to use the first person narrator, Mwangi uses the third person narrator. By using the first person narrator, Mugo is able to let the reader delve into the life of the protagonist. The protagonist is able to make a commentary on a number of issues that affect the young adults and is also able to sensitize them on how to negotiate round them. For instance, the reader is able to feel with Muthini when he faces rejection from both his peers and family and at the same time, rejoice with him when he overcomes the rejection and is able to fit in the society. There is accessibility between the reader and the characters in the novel. The distance between the reader and the narrator is immensely reduced. A confessional tone is assumed and this lets the reader into the secrets of the narrator. The reader is able to relate to the narrator.

The third person narrator used by Mwangi gives the readers the author's feelings about a number of issues raised. He makes a commentary on female circumcision, family relations, empowerment of the girl child. It is not lost to the reader that focus in the novel is on the main character. The reader is made to engage with the main character, share in her tribulations and rejoice with her when she triumphs. The reader is taken through the mind of the characters and is able to decipher why things are the way they are. The narrator takes the reader into Chebet's mind in the internal monologue that is used from time to time. Her feelings about the issue of circumcision and early marriages are thus brought out. Through this, the reader is able to get to know the little details that go on in the novel. The two however succeed in passing on the intended message.

In conclusion, the two writers have articulated those experiences that reflect those of the many youths in Kenya and are able to know that their cases are not unique.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **THE VALUE OF YOUNG ADULTS LITERATURE TO THE YOUTHS IN KENYA IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Having looked at Mugo's *Never Say Never* and Mwangi's *The Delegate* contribution to the young adults' literature in Kenya, it is necessary to discuss of what value the two novels are to the young adults in the contemporary Kenyan society. The value of young adults' literature cannot be quantified but is to be found in how it addresses the needs of its readers. These needs recognize that young adults as beings in evolution, in search of self- identity; beings who are constantly growing and changing, changing from the condition of childhood to that of adulthood. That period of passage called "young adulthood" is a unique part of life, distinguished by unique needs that are – at minimum — physical, intellectual, emotional, and societal in nature.

The study has established that the two novels present us with protagonists who are in search of an identity as they try to fit in a world that is hostile to them. Thus the reader is presented with characters that are experiencing physical, emotional and mental growth and are also made to see how they are dealing with those issues. Muthini grows up in poverty, something that affects him emotionally. He watches his mother get a depression because of this condition. He faces humiliation in school when the head- master keeps throwing him out. The rejection he gets from his childhood girlfriend, Anastasia, and his family does not only break

him but it becomes a turning point in his life. Chebet on the other hand experiences physical growth when she gets a menstrual flow but does not seem to comprehend the changes in her body. She gets emotionally torn when her mother dies at an early age and has to face the world head on. The relatives, from whom she should seek solace, turn against her. This however, does not bring her down. The youths in Kenya can learn a lot from the two. Resilience is a virtue that young adults can emulate.

By addressing these needs, young adult literature is made valuable not only by its artistry but also by its relevance to the lives of its readers. And by addressing not only their needs but also their interests, the literature becomes a powerful inducement for them to read, another compelling reason to value it, especially at a time when adolescent literacy has become a critically important issue. This is because in nurturing an interest in books, the young adults get to know that their experiences are not unique. The study has established that the characters presented in the novels have been used to address the needs of the young adults in the contemporary Kenyan society. This will therefore develop in the reader the urge to know more of the experiences of others from other books. In reading the narratives of both Chebet and Muthini, the young adults in Kenya get to learn that their experiences are similar to those of the characters. They should therefore be in a position to change their attitude about life. The young boys need to know that engaging in drugs use does not solve the problems they are in. This they should learn from Muthini's take on the issue. The drugs he takes do not make him get accepted in the society as he always yearns. Success in education gets him the acceptance he so much desired. Chebet's experiences are the experiences of the young girls in contemporary Kenya. She has to make tough choices which are to determine the direction her life is to take. She is torn between obeying her uncle so as to fulfil her mother's death wish and proceeding with her education. She opts for the latter which does not go down well with her uncle.

Another chief value of young adults' literature is its capacity to offer readers an opportunity to see themselves reflected in its pages. Young adulthood is, intrinsically, a period of tension. On the one hand young adults have an all-consuming need to belong, but on the other, they are also regarding themselves as being unique, which – for them — is not cause for celebration but, rather, for despair. In thinking themselves to be unique, they want to be unlike their peers and therefore isolate themselves. Thus, to see oneself in the pages of a young adult book is to receive the reassurance that one is not alone after all, not other, not alien but, instead, a viable part of a larger community of beings who share a common humanity. A number of young adults in contemporary Kenya can see themselves reflected in the pages of *Never Say Never* and *The Delegate*. The likes of Karanchu who are heroes, in their own way, for all the wrong purposes are worshipped by their peers but Mugo is quick to point out that such heroes get eliminated from the society. Even after going through the Approved schools, Karanchu does not change and ends up dying. Some other readers will see their life reflected in the life of Muthini as he struggles through the Approved schools and emerges victorious at last. The young girls can see themselves reflected in the life of Chebet. Her confusion at the changes taking place in her body is the experience of other young girls as they grow up. Her way of dealing with the issue of female circumcision and early marriages is an issue that many young girls in Kenya have to contend with. The study has established that characters in the two novels reflect the life of the young adults in Kenya and they should therefore not treat their problems in isolation. The two writers are however able to make a statement that those young adults are in a position to overcome the many tribulations they face in life and emerge victorious.

Another value of young adult literature is its capacity for fostering understanding, empathy, and compassion by offering vividly realized portraits of the lives – exterior and interior – of individuals who are unlike the reader. In this way young adult literature

invites its readership to embrace the humanity it shares with those who – if not for the encounter in reading – might forever remain strangers or – worse — irredeemably “other.” In Chebet declaring that she is going to fight for the marginalized after acquiring education, the reader is able to feel with her. The reader sympathises with her when she has to escape into the city and end up losing all she had on her first day there. The reader empathises with her when Rosemary throws her out of her house without pay. The young boys are able to sympathise with Muthini who finds himself in a remand home though he committed no crime. He is rejected by his relatives who treat him with a lot of suspicion. Despite all this the two writers present the readers with two young adults who fight for all they are worth. They do not sit back and whine about the problems they have but they keep bouncing back.

Still, another value of young adult literature is its capacity for telling its readers the truth, however disagreeable that may sometimes be, for in this way it equips readers for dealing with the realities of impending adulthood and for assuming the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The youth in contemporary Kenya are presented with real life experiences and not anything that is sugar coated. By reading about how the protagonists deal with the situations they find themselves in, they too are able to negotiate round some realities.

The themes in young adult literature attract young adult readers because they reflect the reality of young adults’ lives, do not portray false optimism and are not didactic in nature. The acceptance of young adult readers towards such unpretentious themes provides guidelines for writers who are interested in writing for young adult readers. Moreover, it also causes young adult literature critics to give credit to books that present social issues that matter to young adult (Lukens and Clines, 1995). In so doing the youths are presented with real life experiences that they can easily identify with.

To say this reminds us that young readers need to see not only their own faces but also those of people who are different from them, for it's in this way that books show them not only the differences but also the commonalities that comprise their humanity. By acquainting readers with the glorious varieties of the human experience, young adult literature invests young hearts and minds with tolerance, understanding, empathy, acceptance, compassion, kindness, and more.

By giving readers such a frame of reference, it also helps them to find role models, to make sense of the world they inhabit, to develop a personal philosophy of being, to determine what is right and, equally, what is wrong, to cultivate a personal sensibility. To, in other words, become civilized. Both authors pushed boundaries with language, sex, and consequences of decision making within their novels. "The characters can be so trapped by their situations that they convey a helpless, gloomy message. It is when the characters are responsible for solving their problems that adolescent readers are most likely to be empowered to develop confidence in overcoming similar problems of their own" (Louie and Louie, 3). By ending the two novels at an optimistic note it is left to the readers to pass judgement and make a decision on the right path to follow. The novels through the role models created can greatly impact on the reader and turn them into morally upright beings. This is because realistic fiction novels do not "sugar coat" situations, they tend to present intense, authentic situations. Teens are fully aware of violence, conflict, rejection, and sorrow. Realistic fiction is a mirror for those intense moments (Bodart 31). Thus the young adults in Kenya can borrow a lot from the realistic fiction and this can be a tool of change. By reading about other young adults that have challenges and see them overcome them is reason enough for them to face whatever challenges they may come across.

Young adult novels provide a positive avenue for the introduction of thought-provoking explorations of mature issues that encourage readers to examine critical societal and individual situations from a variety of perspectives. The novels, allow readers to vicariously experience challenging, sometimes dangerous situations, in a non-threatening fictional arena. Through these explorations of moral dilemmas in young adult novels readers will develop critical thinking abilities that will allow them to examine moral dilemmas in their own communities and make their own moral decisions from a more balanced and solidified moral stance. Their explorations can also help them to identify societal weaknesses, and provide them with opportunities to develop ideas to help combat some of the pressures that contribute to morally unacceptable choices.

The benefit of teen literature, beyond promoting reading for life, is to provide a fictional landscape in which teens can relate (Ibid 31). This landscape includes real problems with solutions and possibly cathartic moments for the reader. Teens want to vicariously experience problems before living them out in real life. The challenges of puberty, bullying, young love, self-esteem, and coming-of-age are displayed in the young characters of such literature, and most teens relate to these issues. The experiences they come across in the novels helps to shape and mould these characters and to make them, in most cases, better human beings and more able to cope with the adult world they are about to enter.

The study found out that the young adults literature the youths in Kenya in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century get exposed to can help to a great deal shape their world view. According to Salvner, young adults' literature is not necessarily a mirror to the world, but rather it is an experience, a form of living. The literature also becomes a way of sharing lives together, to communicate sorrows and joys. Young adult literature also provides a voice for the youth, sometimes cynical while at other times upbeat. In reading the text, young adult readers may find answers



to life-changing truths and worries (35). A value of the young adult literature genre is its ability to expose the damaging or challenging truth. The young readers are not presented with sugar coated facts that are likely to mislead them.

The two authors have made a great contribution to the young adults' literature in Kenya in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in that they have presented the youths with texts that they can emotionally and intellectually engage with. In other words the texts can be transformative thus the young adults' literature can be used as a tool of change for the youths in Kenya. The young adults' literature can therefore impact greatly on the young adults. This is a field that can be given more attention in value addition to literary knowledge.

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