



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literary Theory and Criticism***Contemporary Kenyan culture and identity in children's literature**

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ABSTRACT

Studies have established the important role played by children's literature in Kenya as a carrier of culture and identity, with the focus on post-colonial Kenya and indigenous Kenyan culture. Being a product of the society, this literature has developed further in response to the contemporary Kenyan society as portrayed in this study. This paper analyses the representation of contemporary Kenyan culture and identity in three selected children's fictional texts: *A New Dawn* by Njoki Gitumbi; *Back to the Roots* by Egara Kabaji and *That's a Deal* by Lilian Ayatta. Cultural and identity issues in the texts are analyzed using categorical distinctions from the Sociological Literary Theory and the Theory of Nations and Nationalism respectively. The study demonstrates that the selected texts are avenues for interrogating what it means to be Kenyan in the contemporary context. The texts are a representation of how Kenyan children literature has developed alongside the Kenyan society. The concerns of the texts reveal how past and present experiences in Kenya affect the norms of behavior, values and attitudes of the present Kenyan society. The significance of the selected children's books as sites for transmission of culture and construction of identity in the contemporary Kenyan society is established.

KEYWORDS: culture, identity, Kenyan children's literature**Hybrid Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies**

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1. Introduction

Children's literature is persuasive in cultural relationships as well as identity formation. Creative writers come from specific environments and their work is a reflection of the social-cultural contexts of these societies. The works perform a set of functions in the society such as didactic ones, offering lessons for the society through presentation of the societal system of ideas, signs, associations and ways of behaving and communicating at a given time in the history of the society. These aspects constitute a people's culture and define who they are. This literature contributes to intellectual, moral and personality development in children. It presents cultural models and ideals so that readers can identify with their culture. Zipes (2001) argues that the main aim of children's literature is to shape readers in accordance with the day's cultural values. Through its elements of entertainment and relaxation, children's literature is a suitable tool for inculcation and internalization of moral and ethical principles, norms, cultural ideals, identity and heritage in children.

Studies have established that Kenyan children's literature has gone through three major phases. First, there was pre-colonial children's literature which was oral in nature. Children were socialized through various genres of oral literature: oral narratives, oral poetry, proverbs, riddles and tongue twisters. The second phase was the Colonial Children's Literature which was introduced during the period Kenya was under colonial leadership. It consisted of literature that was meant for consumption by the Europeans. This literature projected white culture as superior while despising the black experience. The third phase is the Post-colonial Literature which replaced Colonial Literature after the country gained independence from the British imperialists. This literature aimed at reversing the harmful effects of colonial literature by representing and celebrating the African experience. This study has established that children's literature in Kenya has developed further upon Post-colonial Literature in response to the dynamic nature of culture in the context of the contemporary Kenyan society. The study documents the new trend in the content of Kenya's children literature in response to the existing societal modes of being and living.

2. Methods

This study selected three texts on the premise that they richly reflect the contemporary Kenyan society, with lessons aimed at influencing the readers' attitude towards the Kenyan nation. The textual content was interpreted for its presentation of the way of life of the communities in focus. Aspects of culture presented in the texts were categorized into distinctions from the Sociological Literary Theory. Under these categorical distinctions, the study established how contemporary Kenyan culture is portrayed in the selected texts. Reflections of Kenya national identity were examined using categorical distinctions from the Theory of Nations and Nationalism.

3. The Selected Texts

The three texts sampled for this study capture Kenyan children in various situations in the contemporary Kenyan society. *A New Dawn* by Njoki Githumbi (2012) is a play about an ordinary family's involvement in Kenyan politics at a time when the country is emerging from ethnic turbulence. *Back to the Roots* by Egara Kabaji (2011) tells of a girl, Diana, after her first term in boarding school. The story smoothly interconnects an urban and a rural setting, as Diana's family leaves the city for her grandparents' home in rural Kitui. *That's a Deal* by Lilian Ayatta (2008) is a captivating story on a girl, Nancy, and her younger brother, Tipis. It captures children's involvement in the lives and activities of middle/ lower class in the society.

4. Contemporary Kenyan Culture in the Selected Texts

This study analyses cultural issues in the selected texts using categories derived from Sociological Literary theory to determine how the texts present national culture in the contemporary Kenyan context.

4.1 Presentation of Everyday Life

The content of the texts selected is shaped by everyday occurrences in the society. Reflections of everyday life in the selected texts fall under concepts by Rousseau (2007), in Fishman (2013). He identifies the family and the actions of the working class as representations of ordinary life in a society. These are major concerns in *A New Dawn* by Njoki Gitumbi; *Back to the Roots* by Egara Kabaji and *That's a Deal* by Lilian Ayatta.

In *A New Dawn* by Njoki Gitumbi, Nehemiah's family portrays the life of a close-knit family who

are struggling to make ends meet but their fortunes change when Nehemiah wins ten million shillings prize money. The writer presents the struggles of the poor with high cost of living and joblessness. Nehemiah's wife, Veronicah complains that everything is priced like gold these days, (p. 9). Nehemiah wonders how the family even survived seven years without a stable income while having to provide for his family of four and members of the extended family too. The children were constantly away from school for non-payment of school fees. Hope keeps the poor going as seen through Veronicah who sees God as the only hope for the poor, (p. 1). She tells Jeremiah, a family friend, "...we must keep hoping for better days." (p. 4). Despite, having less time for the children, Nehemiah's family's values generally remain the same after they become rich. The elder children, Serah and Numa emphasize the need for hard work to Johny, the youngest child in the family. Nehemiah and Veronicah stress that the children should consider service for mankind before financial gains in their choice of careers.

Egara Kabaji's *Back to the Roots* presents a family of four residing in Buru Buru Estate in Nairobi. The family celebrates accomplishments among its members through the party hosted by Diana's parents to celebrate her successful completion of her first term in boarding school. The parents relate children's to their children as portrayed in the conversation between Diana and her mother as she seeks to know how her parents met. A disconnect between the nuclear and the extended family setup is represented by the distance between where Diana's family lives and her grandparents' rural homes. Her paternal grandparents live in Kisumu while her maternal ones are in Kitui. They had last visited Kisumu four years before.

That's a Deal by Lilian Ayatta depicts a family of four with the children's day at their mother's grocery. The relationship between the siblings, Nancy and Tipis, is the main focus of the text. The two are constantly at conflict with Tipis determined to oppose his elder sister Nancy. On this particular day, Nancy plans to outsmart and punish Tipis for betraying her the previous Sunday when they had found themselves in trouble at home. Despite the glaring sibling rivalry, the two actually care for each other. Nancy feels sorry for her brother when she watches him trying to work out fractions without success and she decides to help him. Tipis too is moved when he sees his sister crying and he starts crying too. The two succeed when they put aside differences and work in harmony. The parents are portrayed as educators for their children. For instance, Tipis has been taught to pursue his goals with determination and that boys and girls are equal. The children are also required to be responsible and accountable at the grocery. The children are receptive of the lessons they learn from the parents as shown by their focus and determination to get things right at the grocery. Tipis recalls his father advice and he tries hard to tackle the Mathematics questions.

The working class is pictured in terms of the challenges it faces as well as its civic responsibility in *A New Dawn*. Loss of work poses a big problem as seen through Nehemiah who had to compete for a few available jobs with many other jobless people after he was retrenched from his parastatal job. The working class is synonymous with the voters in the play. Their blindness is blamed for repeatedly electing bad leaders, hence the workers are called upon to take up their responsibility to elect good leaders.

Back to the Roots portrays workers as responsible citizens who besides their official duties join in fighting for the general public. Diana's parents, who are both lawyers, are part of the estate committee that are working to challenge the grabbing of the estate playing field by private developers.

That's a Deal presents the diligence and creativity of the working class in a competitive business community. Manu the chips seller retains his customer base by using jokes and promising an extra serving to children who complained of having been given the wrong change. Moreover, the chips from his shop were delicious so his customers kept coming back. A business person has to strive to attract customers as shown by the tall young man who was selling second hand clothes. He exaggerates on the quality of the clothes and dresses in conspicuous female outfits to attract buyers' attention. Similarly, other vendors try to attract customers in various ways like singing and dancing, (p. 6). The need to meet the needs of the customers is key. This is captured when a customer asks for a quarter of cabbage that Nancy had cut to explain fractions to Tipis. More customers come in for fractions of cabbage. Nancy even goes a step further to chop cabbages and pack them in plastic bags and the grocery receives more customers than ever as a result of this. Creativity in business, to increase profits, is portrayed through Nancy and Tipis as they decide to make a vegetable salad and later a fruit salad to recover the money they had lost to the con woman.

4.2 The Corrective Function

The reflections in *A New Dawn* by Njoki Gitumbi; *Back to the Roots* by Egara Kabaji and *That's a Deal* by Lilian Ayatta point to ills in the society in order to correct them in line with Duhan (2015). *A New Dawn* presents voters' fault in repeatedly electing poor leaders and also calls for voters to speak out against ineffective governance. Negative ethnicity and divisive politics are portrayed as threats to the existence of the Kenyan society. The play sounds this warning with reference to the 2007- 2008 post-election violence in Kenya. *Back to the Roots* also points out to tribalism and calls out to readers to embrace cultural diversity through the lessons Diana has received from her teacher, her grandmother and her father. Con-man-ship is identified in both *A New Dawn* and *That's a Deal* as a vice that people should be on the lookout for so as not to fall victim. *That's a Deal* also portrays unhealthy competition and division through Nancy and Tipis who spend part of their day trying to outsmart each other but when they stop and work as a team, their efforts at the grocery bear fruit as they actually enjoy working in harmony with each other. *Back to the Roots* presents land grabbing both in urban and rural areas. The fight against the vice by the Estate Committee at Diana's residence is a warning to perpetrators as well as a call to resist it.

4.3 Reflections of Kenya's Dominant Cultural Values

Hall (1983) asserts that literary works are shaped by the dominant cultural values of the age. Core values of the Kenyan society reflected in the selected texts include education, diversity, industriousness, hospitality and respect.

Value for education is a main concern in *A New Dawn* by Njoki Gitumbi, *Back to the Roots* by Egara Kabaji and *That's a Deal* by Lilian Ayatta. Parents in the three texts emphasize on good grades in school. Veronica and Nehemiah give the first priority to paying their children's school fees after Nehemiah wins the prize money. Nehemiah expresses pride over Numa's good academic performance but he is worried about Johnny's poor performance. School assignments are portrayed as major concerns at home. Serah and Numa advise Johnny to do his homework before entertaining himself. These sentiments are echoed by their father as soon as he comes home and notices Johnny doing his homework then which he considers late. Veronica stresses on this too. Similarly, Nancy advises Tipis to settle and do his homework when the grocery is less busy in *That's a Deal*. He had promised his mother that he would have done his homework by the time she comes back, (p. 15). His mother was pleased to find that he had done the work correctly. In *Back to the Roots*, the residents of the estate where Diana's family resides rejoice because children in the estate have performed well in school. They also express their approval for the Southern Street where each family has at least one child at the university, (p. 2).

Appreciation for diversity is advocated in the reflections of the selected texts. *A New Dawn* calls for communities to embrace each other to avoid a repeat of the 2007- 2008 post polls chaos in the poem by the youth, (p. 60). Mama Nuru calls out to the people to reject politicians who thrive on negative ethnicity, (p. 54). Diana's teacher, her father and her grandmother in *Back to the Roots* portray appreciation for cultural diversity. They preach appreciation of one's culture and respect for other cultures noting that each culture carries its wealth of wisdom. *That's a deal* presents diversity symbolically in line with the symbolic interactionist perspective as proposed by Mead (1934). The conflict between Tipis and Nancy is resolved when they work in harmony while utilizing each other's gifts. The writer portrays the significance of embracing differences by presenting different abilities in each child and showing how their combined strengths and effort contribute to their success at the grocery. Nancy cut the vegetables nicely while Tipis had the charm to invite customers into the grocery. Even though the two children have different interests and abilities, together they increase profits at the shop.

The selected texts present the immediate community as an important branch in the affairs of the nation, after the family. *A New Dawn* presents the community as a body that reasons together in making political decisions. The elders are the representatives and defenders of the community. They accuse Nehemiah of having taken a bribe from their tribe's enemies to destroy the political agenda of the tribe. The community has been depending on the elder's guidance to decide whom to vote for to represent them in leadership but this is challenged by Mama Regina who says that she would henceforth decide who represents her when she realizes that the elders' decisions have been pegged on selfish interests, (p. 96).

Back to the Roots presents the community in an urban setting. Diana's parents hold a party to celebrate her successful completion of her first term in boarding school. All their neighbors in Kawi Street are present at the party, (p. 1). The estate also has a committee which will be meeting to look into the problem of the children's playing field which has been grabbed by private developers. In rural Kisumu, a sense of communal living is reflected by the extended family sharing the same compound. Diana's father's five brothers lived in the large compound. Some neighbors came to greet her parents who then distribute gifts among them, (p. 29).

That's a Deal portrays communal responsibility for children by the adults. A street boy who had snatched ice cream from a lady in the streets is advised by the lady to ask for something that he wants instead of stealing. She stresses her point by buying ice cream for another street boy who had not tried to steal while denying the culprit the favor, (p. 11-12). The street community is on the lookout for the children as shown when Tipis goes around the market persuading sellers to buy the vegetable salad Nancy and he were preparing at their mother's grocery. Although some people agreed to buy the salad, others thought he was too young to be selling things with others even threatening to report to his mother, (p. 36).

A New Dawn depicts the culture of hospitality through Veroniah who welcomes visitors warmly into her home. She makes Jeremiah feel at home when he visits and quickly prepares tea for him, (p. 8). Nehemiah welcomes the elders who visit his home unannounced even though he notes that, 'it's a woman who warms the house.' *That's a Deal* brings out lessons in diligence through the children, Nancy and Tipis. Their combined efforts increase sales at their mother's grocery.

4.4 Texts as Products of Kenya's Historical and Social Formations

The selected texts reflect Kenya's history. Hunt (2001) proposes that as a reflection of particular historical formations, children's literature provides a site for power struggles which position young readers to take particular ideas. *A New Dawn* portrays the struggle for independence through Mama Nuru who urges the crowd in the rally to be willing to pay the price to rid the country of the new colonialism, like the freedom fighters did to free the country from the British imperialism, (p. 53). Presentation of the violence that took place in Kenya after the 2007 elections is a wakeup call to readers to be alert and reject divisive politics.

Hunt asserts that children's texts actively produce social norms and relationships and they are partly about how the society wishes to be seen and partly about what it is actually like. The selected texts present ideal families with regards to the relationships between the parents and parental responsibilities. In *A New Dawn*, Nehemiah and Veronica are depicted as a passionate and supportive couple through poverty and the riches later on. They are responsible parents as shown in their concern with their children's progress in education even when they are busy with business and politics.

Back to the Roots presents an ideal family with the parents associating closely between themselves and with their children. The couple fill each other in on the happenings of the day when Diana's father comes home. Diana's father appreciates his wife's careful driving, (p. 23). Responsible parenting is portrayed by the intimate mother-daughter conversation on how Diana's parents met. Diana is also very close to her father as seen in her excitement when she welcomes him home. The parents are actively involved in educating their children. The writer does not point out to any flaws in this family. The extended family set up at Diana's grandmother rural home in Kisumu is also flawless. Diana's father had five brothers and they live in the same compound with their mother. The relationship with neighbors is friendly as shown when some come to greet Diana's parents. There is evidence of a strong extended family bond as the family work and take their meals together.

The family in *That's a Deal* also presents ideal parents. Nancy's mother is very concerned about her husband's health and had insisted that he sees a doctor, (p. 15). She had then left her children to take care of the grocery as she took him to hospital. The parents are also actively involved in their children's education. These ideal family set ups are interpreted as an attempt to shape the family culture in the society.

5. National Identity in the Selected Texts

The national identity reflected in the selected texts is analyzed using tenets of the theory of nations and nationalism.

5.1 Invented traditions

Invented traditions are practices intended to inculcate values and norms of behavior learned through repetition, as proposed by Hobsbawm (1983). Respect for cultural diversity is presented as a crucial element for the society in *Back to the Roots* in which cultural diversity and integration are brought out within learning institutions and through marriage. Diana's parents are from different Kenyan Communities. Diana interrogates her mother on how her father and she met being that they come from different communities. Her mother tells her they met at the university where they were both studying law, (p. 13-14). Through Diana, the writer presents children's awareness of different ethnic groups in the society. Her teacher has taught her class to respect and appreciate different cultures in the country. This is a lesson she had also received from both her father and grandmother as they emphasized the importance of learning the culture of her own community. Diana's ethnicity is a mixture of both her father's and her mother's, hence she has made an effort to learn both their first languages. Diana had first learnt the Kenya National languages, English and Kiswahili. The playwright in *A New Dawn* expresses the beauty and strength in embracing diversity through Jeremiah as he urges the crowd at the rally to shun tribalism, (p. 49). Mama Nuru warns against negative ethnicity as she reminds the people of the senseless killing and destruction that happened along tribal lines after the disputed presidential elections in 2007, (p. 52). The two texts portray awareness and appreciation of ethnic differences as a norm in the society.

Orality in written form in *A New Dawn* is presented as a norm that the characters identify with. The use of oral narratives and proverbs in the play depicts a common Kenyan heritage from the traditional oral literature. Examples of oral narratives in the play include the goat who trusted the leopard with her kids and the proverbial hen who borrowed a razor to groom her chicks but forgot to take care of it. Wise sayings are also used to emphasize the speaker's message. For instance, Nehemiah tells Jeremiah to be patient about MCD getting enough publicity via the media. He says, "The cock that crows today was once a chick." (p. 63). Mama Nuru calls for unity against bad leadership and she emphasizes, "A single finger cannot kill a louse." Hence, the play presents orality as a form of expression in Kenyan society.

Enlightenment on the political situation is reflected as an invented culture in *A New Dawn*. The people's awareness of the politics of the nation is shown to be on the rise. Jeremiah is an enlightened voter who asserts that Mheshimiwa Baptista must listen to those who voted him into office and fulfil his promises to them. In Jeremiah's words, "a great leader is judged by the manner in which he treats the little man on the street. After all, the little man is the one who makes the big man big," (p. 2). Nehemiah has come to the realization that politicians like Mheshimiwa Baptista are self-centered and are unconcerned about the people once they get elected into office, (p.3-4). The playwright reflects awareness of the responsibility of the voters for the poor politics and leadership in the country. Jeremiah expresses his concern, "but what beats me is that they keep voting Mheshimiwa back into office, term after term!" (p. 5). The voters' blame stretches further to facilitating bribery in elections. While playing Mheshimiwa Baptista's role, Nehemiah complains that the people milked him dry before electing him. He is convinced that he would not win the next elections if he is unable to bribe the voters. Hence, he is utilizing his term to amass wealth so as to be able to remain in power, (p. 89). Even though Nehemiah is now enlightened, he had played a major role maintaining the status quo. He had been Baptista's campaign manager in exchange for a luxurious living, (p.7- 8). The people have a duty to elect good leaders and Nehemiah realizes the voters' mistake: "the casual attitude with which we have made political choices trivializing our mandate to elect responsible leaders." Veronica notes that the people have allowed those with no integrity to rule for too long, (p. 40). These sentiments are echoed by Mama Nuru who adds that the voters have the power to elect good leaders and say no to the bad ones, (p. 55). Jeremiah blames voters' blindness for the poor state of politics in the country, "For such a long time, we have been blind to our circumstances, our collective power. And all this time, the John Baptistas of this country have been eating off the fat of the land with a laddle!" (p. 65). Mama Nuru and other members of Movement for Change and Democracy agree that the people's silence in the face of evil has allowed bad leadership to prevail in the country, (p. 72-73).

Back to the Roots presents awareness of corruption and the people's active involvement in fighting it through characters exposing and countering land grabbing. Diana's parents are part of the estate committee that is seeking to legal redress against people who have grabbed the playing field. Diana had already read in the newspapers about such private developers who had grabbed public spaces for themselves. Diana's grandmother in rural Kisumu tells Diana's father that Itigo forest has been grabbed by politicians and their friends. Some

young boys had reported this in church, (p. 28).

Alertness against the vice of con-man-ship is presented as a societal norm. In *A New Dawn*, Nehemiah's promptly concludes that someone is out to con him when he receives a call informing him that he has won ten million shillings from a promotion at a telephone company, (p. 12). Veronica too hastily concludes that the financial advisor suggested by the company CEO to guide Nehemiah on how to invest the money was a con, (p. 19). Veronica and Nehemiah recount an actual instance when Jakubu was conned of his coffee payment in the city by a stranger, a 'prophet'. The stranger had told Jakubu things about himself that were real and Jakubu had been convinced that the stranger was indeed a prophet when another stranger came in and was full of gratitude to the 'prophet' for 'miracles' that had happened in his life. Children are not spared from this vice as portrayed in *That's a Deal*. A smartly dressed lady comes into the grocery and tricks Nancy to give her one thousand shillings, claiming that Nancy's mother had asked for it. The children are convinced that their mother needs the money for their father who had gone to hospital and they quickly give the woman the money but even forget to ask for her name. The writer brings out the need for children to be alert so as not to fall victim to con artists as Nancy and Tipis learn their lesson.

Hobsbawm identifies official government ideas and institutions as an element of invented traditions that define a nation. *Back to the Roots* presents the courts as the avenue to seek justice. Diana's mother and a neighbor agree that they have to take the person who grabbed their children's playground to court, (p. 11-12). The ministry of Lands is also cited in the search for truth and justice. Diana's father got details of the culprit of the land grabbing from the ministry, (p. 140). The Kenya Wildlife Service is portrayed as an effective force when their officers arrive soon after Diana makes a call to them to take care of the gazelle that was hurt, (p. 23).

Signifiers of official and government ideas in *A New Dawn* are the Kenyan constitution and the Constituency Bursary Fund. Numa points out that the new constitution requires that any appointments to public offices must be preceded by vetting of candidates, (p. 73). The right to hold peaceful demonstrations in accordance with the Kenyan constitution is alluded to. A school girl visits Mheshimiwa, to follow up on her application for the Constituency Bursary Fund, (p. 84).

5.2 The Kenyan Nation as an Imagined Community

The selected texts have presented imagined communities that define the Kenyan nation in line with Anderson (1991). According to Anderson, nations are imagined as members of a nation who are aware of the existence of each other even if they will never interact, see or hear of most of the other members. *A New Dawn* presents such a community of Kenyan voters, a community responsible for ensuring that the nation has good leaders. The voters presented in the text are aware of the existence of the rest in the nation even if they may never interact and that together, they actively control the political environment in the country. Nehemiah expresses that voters have themselves to blame for bad leadership if they continue accepting bribes, (p. 40). The nation is portrayed as a community consisting of voters who have the power to transform the nation in the words of Mama Nuru, (p. 55). This community is required to break their silence and fight for good leadership collectively. MCD officials recognize the existence of this community and the need to reach out to them through the media as they might never interact with them directly. Jeremiah is concerned that the message at the MCD rally may not reach the people as it only received a brief mention in the newspaper. However it received a lot of attention on the social media, (p. 68). Hence the media is portrayed as an important link for the community (imagined)

The nation is also portrayed as a community (imagined) of people of different ethnic backgrounds. Individually and collectively, they are aware of each other's existence as part of the nation of diverse cultural backgrounds. Nehemiah tells the crowd at the rally that each tribe needs the other for the nation to thrive. Mama Nuru echoes this as she cites how we turned against each other in the 2007-2008 post-election violence. She adds that we were destroying the nation we had toiled so hard to build, (p. 52). Hence, the Kenyan nation is depicted as a community of different tribes. The national community thrives in the unity of the people of these different cultural backgrounds who may never hear, see or interact with each other. *Back to the Roots* also presents the Kenyan nation as a community of people of different ethnicities who thrive in appreciation for cultural diversity. Diana's teacher had taught the class that this cultural diversity made the nation beautiful, (p. 17).

5.3 Fundamental Features of National Identity

Basic characteristics of national identity as advanced by Smith (1999) are portrayed in the selected texts. These are common mass public culture and national economy, histories and geography.

5.3.1 Common Mass Public Culture

Exercising one's mandate as a voter is portrayed as a common culture in Kenya in *A New Dawn*. Mama Nuru reminds the crowd at the rally that as registered voters, they have a duty to vote in good leaders as patriotic citizens.

Respect for cultural diversity is depicted as a common shared culture in the country in *Back to the Roots* with adults educating the children to respect it. Diana learns the value of appreciating cultural diversity from her teacher and from her parents. MCD officials remind the crowd at the rally of the importance of embracing cultural diversity in *A New Dawn*.

Value for education is portrayed as a common culture in the country in the selected texts. Nehemiah and Veronica give first priority to paying school fees for their children when Nehemiah wins the prize money in *A New Dawn*. They emphasize that their children give priority to school work. In *Back to the Roots*, the people in Diana's estate are proud of the children's academic performance in their street. Nancy's parents in *That's a Deal* also value their children's education as her mother is pleased to find Tipis has done his assignment correctly.

That's a Deal presents craftiness in a competitive business environment. Individuals carrying out business at the shopping center employ various tactics to attract and retain customers. Nancy and Tipis too increase profits at their mother's grocery through creativity, diligence and teamwork.

5.3.2 National Economy, Histories and Geography

A common economy as reflected in *A New Dawn* reflects a Kenyan identity. The play captures the nation going through inflation, (p. 4, 35). The parliament endorsed Structural Adjustment programmes for all parastatals and the civil service which led to loss of jobs through retrenchments, (p. 7).

Shared histories as depicted in *A New Dawn* advance a Kenyan national identity. The 2007-2008 post-election violence that was experienced in Kenya is a historical point of reference in the play against which the MCD, a political movement, is advocating for the unity of all the tribes in the country. Mama Nuru reminds the crowd in the rally how Kenyans turned against each other on tribal grounds, (p. 52- 53). The poem recited by the youth at the rally tells of the suffering, destruction and death that were caused by negative ethnicity, (p. 58-60). There is reference to the sacrifice made by the Kenyans who struggled for independence as mama Nuru calls on the people to fight for independence against the 'new colonialism', (p. 53).

Kenyan geography portrayed in *Back to the Roots* is a fundamental feature of Kenyan identity. Dina's mother suggests that the family uses the road that passes through Mai Mahiu on their way from Nairobi to Kisumu so that the children could see the Great Rift Valley. Diana had learnt in school about its formation and she was eager to see the lakes in it. The writer describes the sharp corners towards of the Rift Valley, the beautiful ridges and the dormant mountains, (p. 20).

5.4 Banal Nationalism

Banal signifiers of national identity as proposed by Billig (1995) are presented in *That's a Deal* and *A New Dawn* make reference in form of modern Kenyan music. On being outwitted by Nancy, Tipis plays along to avoid being teased with the song: 'who is the chicken now? Quack, Quack...' This was a popular Kenyan song by Nameless, a Kenyan musician. In *A New Dawn*, Veronica sings, 'Akisema Atakubariki' by a Kenyan singer, Ruth Wamuyu, as she celebrates Nehemiah's prize money, (p. 16). At the MCD rally, the crowd chants, 'yote yawezekana na MCD'. This borrows from a popular political chant for the opposition during the general elections in Kenya in 2002. In *Back to the Roots*, the national languages are identified. Diana's ethnicity is a mixture of both her father's and her mother's, hence she has made an effort to learn both their first languages. Diana had first learnt the Kenya National languages, English and Kiswahili.

6. Conclusion

The study has shown that the three texts are significant for their representation of contemporary Kenyan culture and identity. It has established that Kenya's children literature has developed further from being a carrier of indigenous culture and post colonialism to a reflection of the contemporary Kenyan experience that is mirrored in the selected texts. The texts are important avenues for young Kenyan readers to interact with their nation in meaningful ways that can impact on their feelings, attitudes and behaviors and develop a sense of belonging to their country.

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