THE PORTRAYAL OF GIRL CHARACTERS IN SELECTED CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN KENYA

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the Degree of Master of Arts in Literature, Kenyatta University.

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

Joseph H. Muleka

This thesis has been submitted for the award of the degree of Master of Arts of Kenyatta University with our approval as university supervisors.

Dr. Muigai wa Gachanja

Dr. Nyambura Mpesha
DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of my beloved father, the late Constant Muleka Wanjala.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to my two supervisors, Dr. Nyambura Mpesha and Dr. Muigai wa Gachanja for the time they spared for my work and for their constant advice in an effort to ensure that this work got to a successful finish. I particularly commend them for their understanding and patience.

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Last but not least, I am grateful to the following people: Michael Oyoo Weche for assisting me in the choice of topic of study and his subsequent support as I went about my work; Ezekiel Alembi for his encouragement; Gerald Ouma Wangenge for his enlightening discussions; Wilberforce Mwanga and Lilian Pamba who tirelessly kept typing and retyping my work through the uncountable corrections; my classmates in the 1998/99 MA class, Fidelis Aura and Joseph Murungu and many other people who facilitated me in one way or another but whom I have not mentioned here.
ABSTRACT

This study is a literary analysis of the portrayal of girl characters in children's books by Kenyan writers. The analysis is done with close reference to selected children's books by E. Alembi, A.B. Odaga, D. Mailu, P. Kola, F. Imbuga, M.I. Moraa, G.N. Kamau, and E. Orchandson-Mazrui. The study is predicated on the premise 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.

We carried out an analytical study of characterization and style in the selected books through thorough reading of the books and responding to set out questions. While we based our examination of characters on the parameter of sex and gender, 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. In view of such an eventuality, the study advocates for a literature that will seek to emancipate girl children, enabling them to compete equitably with boy children.
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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Background to the Study

This study is an analysis of the portrayal of girl characters in selected children’s books in Kenya. The selected books are: *Fine Feathers* and *Settling the Score* by Alembi; *Jande’s Ambition* and *The Villager’s Son* by Odaga; *The Poor Child* and *The Priceless Gift* by Maillu; *The Wise Little Girl* by Kola; *Kagai and her Brothers* by Imbuga; *The Adventures of Mekatiliki* by Orchardson-Mazrui; *Little Wangui* and *Adventures of Pongo and Uncle Talema* by Kamau and *The Magic Stone* by M.I Moraa.

The study takes cognizance of the fact that many African communities are patriarchal in their social set-ups. The woman in these communities is relegated to a peripheral position, confined by tradition and gender to the background, while the man is put on the forefront. In any undertaking, the male is normally the hero and the focal point, while the woman only serves to facilitate his success. Uwakweh (1998:9) confirms this when she says:

> Gender identity, and its exclusionary potentials for the female are deeply rooted in the fabric of traditional and modern African societies. Gender determines women’s status, roles in the domestic/private spheres and the levels of their participation in political/public spheres.

In the past, some societies viewed the woman as some kind of commodity that could be used to generate wealth. Among the Igbo “nwanyibuego” was a popular term meaning “woman is wealth.” In Emecheta (1978) the main
character is named “Aku-nna” at birth meaning literally “father’s wealth.” In other communities, women were indistinctively counted among items for sale or those used to settle compensational scores. Roscoe (1965:261) confirms this practice of female commodification among the Baganda community during punishment of offenders:

... although death was usually the punishment inflicted for an adultery, an offender’s life would be spared, and he would be fined two women... In case of accidental homicide the offender paid a fine. The fine for homicide was generally 20 cows, 20 goats, 20 barkcloths and 20 women. (Emphasis mine).

Owing to the society’s view of women as items of wealth, the ultimate goal assigned to a woman was and still remains marriage. Through marriage, the woman could most surely generate wealth to facilitate the interests of men. In Emecheta (1978) Aku-nna is valued by her parents primarily for the bride price she would fetch upon her marriage. Similarly, Aku-nna is to be married off early in order to raise her brother’s school fees.

On the overall, patriarchal orientation tends to extol myths that perpetuate gender bias. Such myths ultimately glorify the male hero while playing down the role of the woman by presenting her as passive or dependent. Men in such social set-ups make a deliberate effort to create a woman they can control. They want a woman like Nana in Alkali’s *The Virtuous Woman*. Alkali (1987:10) presents Nana as a quiet and good-natured girl, who sees the man as superior. “She is not aggressive but coy, not boisterous but quiet, not assertive but compromising”. Nana, represents what society views as an ideal woman, a character that Muthiku in *Kisalu and Fruit his Garden* is expected to grow into.
The way society views the woman interests us because of its influence on literature. As Wa Thiong’o (1972:16) observes:

"Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society."

Wa Thiong’o’s observation implies that the literature of a people emanates from the people and is used to perpetuate their beliefs. From this understanding, we make a deduction that literature will reflect what views a society upholds.

On the other hand, the literary writers who play the role as society’s mouthpiece are often greatly influenced by the same society. As Achebe (1974:42) puts it, “...the writer and his society live in the same place.” Owing to the proximity of the writers to the society in which they live, the societal beliefs and attitudes they uphold are often reflected in their literary works. For instance, Wini in Meja Mwangi’s *Going Down River Road*, is portrayed as a mere sex instrument for men. Such portrayal could be reflective of the popular view in many African societies that a woman’s major role in life is to facilitate the pleasures of the man.

Our study recognizes the fact that works of literature embody the values that the writer wishes to propagate or perpetuate. In children’s literature, more so than adult literature, these values are largely passed on through characterization. Characterization thus becomes important in children’s books. This study examines how the girl characters have been portrayed in children’s
storybooks in Kenya. The study examines the portrayal in linguistic terms as well as illustrations.

1.1 Definition of Terms

A Child: We employ Tucker's (1981:9) definition of a child as "that being between school age and puberty". In our case, we are considering children between six and sixteen, since this is the group that may most easily be affected by what they read, being in their formative years.

Children's Literature: Different scholars define the term children's literature in various ways. Cass (1967) considers children's literature to comprise children's fiction and written tales. Davies (1973) uses the term to refer to written books for children, thus tallying with Cass' (1967) description, but he also adds children's folk tales. Mpesha (1995) considers it to refer to literary works which are meant for children's entertainment and enjoyment. She also recognizes that the term is used to include works that are outside the literary field. Epstein (in Alan Davies, 1973), argues that children's interest in a book is what can determine whether it is a book for children or not. Our study adopts Cass' (1967) and Davies' (1973) view of children's literature though we limit ourselves to written children's storybooks.
Gender: Ukwakweh (1998:10) defines gender as “a differentiation between maleness and femaleness.” Lott (1991:6) uses the word gender to “identify our learned definitions of women and men, in terms of behaviours, conceived as either appropriate for men or women.” This study applies the term gender as advanced by the Forum for African Women Educationalists which refers to gender as the “social, cultural and psychological features that identify someone as a man or as a woman,” FAWE (1998). This definition thus, postulates gender as an ideological attribute.

Girl child: Our reference to girl child considers females in their formative years. When used in a story as a character we refer to her as “girl character.”

Patriarchy: This study employs the term patriarchy to refer to the social set-up in which the man is the head of the family or clan or community. In such set-ups, life is considered from the point of view of the man or males in general, while women are assigned insignificant roles.

Portrayal: Portrayal of the girl character refers to the description given about the girl child in order to project her in a particular way. “Diminutive portrayal” aims at lowering the dignity or social esteem of the girl child. “Superfluous portrayal” on the other hand is a contrast of diminutive portrayal, so that in the latter, the girl child is over-glorified. She is portrayed as possessing extraordinary abilities, while “rationalistic portrayal” concurs with the view that the girl
child is a normal human being who has capabilities of human success or failure.

**Stereotyping:** A stereotype is a fixed idea or image that people have of a particular type of person or thing. When the girl child is portrayed in fixed images, for instance, as strictly being capable of one thing and not the other; or when the society ascribes to her certain roles as invariably being her duty; or where a society’s myths, expectations, sanctions and beliefs restrict her to certain spheres of life, that is what this study calls stereotyping.

**Style:** Leech and Short (1981:10), define style as “the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose.” This definition relates closely with Saussure’s (1959:13) distinction between “language” and “parole”, where the former refers to the code or system of rules common to speakers or writers of a language, while the latter is concerned with the particular uses of this system, or selections from this system, that speakers or writers apply on this or that occasion.

However Leech and Short (1981:11) concede that the view of style as preferred above only represents a general interpretation. They argue that the term style is ambiguous as it raises questions such as: “To what do we attribute style?” They further observe that these questions have often failed to draw consensus:
Sometimes the term has been applied to the linguistic habits of a particular writer; at other times it has been applied to the way language is used in a particular genre, period, school of writing or some combination of these: “epistolary style,” “early eighteenth century style,” “the style of the Victorian novel...”

Owing to such diversity on the view of the term style, Leech and Short (1981:10), advise that it would better be used, “... in so far as it encapsulates a particular conception or theory of the phenomena one wishes to study.” This implies that style is particular and situational. So, different situations may actually have different considerations of what style really entails.

Generics In this study, we use “generics” to refer to those terms and references that are designed to be gender neutral. These include words like man, manpower, mankind, manmade, animal husbandry or businessmen. Also included are etymological terms such as elders and chiefs, and those terms that have no linguistically in-built gendered character, but which seem to have acquired a male character in usage within certain cultures. The latter include words like driver, farmer, or scientist.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Characterization in the books that children read is crucial to the character development of the young readers. It is however a matter of concern that even with the understanding that characterization plays a major role in the lives of
children, scholars have not taken interest to investigate how character portrayal is done in children’s books in Kenya, more so girl character portrayal. Instead, scholars as elucidated in our “rationale”, have concentrated on examining how women are portrayed. Investigating how girl characters are portrayed in books for children will help us determine how the young readers may be affected. This is because children identify with the principal characters in the books they read. The values exhibited through the heroes and heroines in these books may be internalized by them and thus influence their behaviour.

The proposed study aims at examining how girl characters are portrayed in storybooks by Kenyan writers. The study also aims at answering the following pertinent questions:

i) What is the position of the girl character in a literature emanating from a patriarchal society; a society that often privileges men over women?

ii) What deductions arise through the patterns emerging from (i)?

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study employs three theoretical approaches: sociological, feminist and stylistics.

Sociological theory is crucial where the individual and society are at the heart of an issue. It views literature as a mirror of the society. Under this theoretical framework, literature is endowed with the ability to tell much about a given
society. So, literature always serves a specific purpose in society. The literary writer on the other hand is treated as one informed by and drawing his material from society. This theory also holds that the writer writes with a purpose. A writer’s work therefore reflects the social and other influences, which have inspired one. Hermeren (1975:3) reiterates this when he states:

Works of art are not produced in a vacuum. Every work of art is surrounded by what might be called its artistic field ... political and social structure. All this may influence the works of art.

We employ Hermeren’s interpretation of the sociological theory in our investigation of what kind of literature is available about the girl child in a patriarchal society.

Other scholars have made their contributions to this theory. Albrecht (1978:105) acknowledges the role of literature in society when he says: “...in most theories of the relationship of literature and society, reflection, influence and social control are implied.” Albrecht’s observation supports the view that literature is a reflection of society but that it also influences and controls society. This influence could affect the girl child. But Rosenblatt (1968: 83) sees literature as more than just a mirror of society:

Literature is not a mere mirror of life. Literature is itself an integral part of culture and has the same complex relation with the rest of cultural setting.

However, Rosenblatt acknowledges that literature can be reformed to serve new purposes when she says, “If sometimes it offers a realistic description, at
other times it may represent an escape from, or compensation for actual conditions."

This observation is significant as it implies that literature can be modified or redefined to suit emerging trends. The writer thus has no excuse for perpetuating societal stereotypes about the girl for the very reason that he or she is being faithful to the conventions of the society.

Other scholars who subscribe to sociological theory, for instance, Wa Thiong'o (1972) and Achebe (1975) tally in their views on the moral theory of literature and consider literature as serving some purpose in society. The sociological theory of literature, thus, interprets literature from the point of view of its societal importance: its social function of storing and transmitting the values of a given society. Other scholars like Cass (1967), Tucker (1976), Micere Mugo (1978) and Mwanzi (1982) acknowledge the influence of literature in children's socialization process.

Literary scholars who employ the sociological framework emphasize on the content of a text. However, as Lubbock (1957:23) points out, "form and content are inseparable." Our study agrees with Lubbock's observation. We thus also employ the stylistic approach in the analysis of the selected texts. The stylistic approach facilitates us in our analysis of the form and style of the texts and how the form relates with the content of the texts. Stylistic approach considers literary language as an important tool of communication in any work
of art. Stephen (1991:349) says that one aim of stylistics is to define a work of literature in terms of its patterns of speech, diction, sentence structure and imagery.

Stylistics concentrates on the style employed in a text and how the author chooses to express him/herself. Leech and Short (1981) consider stylistics as the main descriptive theory of a literary text. For this reason, we adopt the stylistic approach as the tool to be used in describing the form and style of the selected texts. But like the sociological theory, stylistics also considers a work of art as a reflection of the author’s appreciation of his/her own cultural environment. In this aspect, the two theories complement one another. But specifically, the sociological approach is beneficial in the analysis of the writers’ thematic concerns while the stylistic approach is useful in analysis of the writers’ style.

Since the study examines the portrayal of the girl character, we have also employed feminist literary criticism. This is the study of literature with particular attention to the women question. Feminist Literary Criticism dates back to the 1970s with such works as Kate Millet’s (1970) *Sexual Politics*, which analysed the system of sex rate, stereotyping and the oppression of women under the patriarchal social organization.

Feminist criticism is not a monolithic literary approach. Frank (in Jones ed. 1984: 35) says that there are a number of feminist criticisms covering a broad
spectrum from the sociological, prescriptive and polemical, to the formalist and aesthetic. According to Showalter (in Jacobus 1979: 72), there are two prominent branches of feminist literary criticism: Feminist Critique and Gynocriticism. The former is historically grounded and is concerned with the woman as a reader. Its subjects include the images and stereotypes of women in literature and omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism. The latter is concerned with the woman as a writer, with subjects such as psychodynamics of female creativity, linguistics and the problems of the female language; studies of particular writers and works. Even though the two branches are crucial to us as they both stress on the perception of women in literature, our study draws mostly on the branch of Feminist Critique, particularly the subject of images and stereotypes of women in literature. Since our sampling includes both male and female writers, the two branches are crucial in the analysis of the portrayal of the girl character.

Under the feminist criticism, we take interest in how the writers of the selected books have portrayed characters and employed language to create gender context of parity or disparity between girl and boy characters. To do this, our study adopts the “ABC of Gender Analysis” as proposed in the *ABC of Gender Analysis* booklet, which was specially prepared to provide a gender screen for the review and analysis of books. The working of the “ABC of Gender Analysis” framework is given exposition in our methodology.
1.4 Literature Review

Critical writing and commentary on children’s literature in Kenya and Africa in general is yet to be given prominence as compared with other parts of the world. But as Akoleit (1990) observes, there seems to be a growing interest in this area, among literary scholars. This is an encouraging development, because, as she points out, critical writing on children’s literature will improve the quality of children’s books in Kenya.

Our literature review endeavours to foreground the need for scholars to take more interest in children’s literature, and proceeds to look at the role of the writer in society. It further takes interest in the nature of children, choice of reading material and the influence of the reading material on the children’s character formation. The review then discusses the interest that other scholars have shown in the portrayal of female characters in various works and what remains to be done.

Some of the scholars who show interest in children’s literature have tried to highlight its significance in the life of a child. They argue that childhood is an important stage of human development. Okolie (1998:30) says: “In the beginning, there was childhood and childhood makes the man or woman.” This means that the stage of childhood could determine the kind of adult to be expected in future. Okolie’s observation is true, thus calling for greater attention from scholars to children’s literature which is an important factor in shaping the character of children.
Since childhood is a crucial stage in the development of an individual, the quality of books availed to children at this stage becomes a major concern because children respond to what they read. Tucker (1976:180) observes:

*Children have to learn conventions and some stories with clear conventions are helping children who are trying to build up some ways of predicting the immediate future ...*

This view presupposes that children internalize what they read in books and this internalization may mould their behaviour as adults. We therefore get concerned about the kind of values emphasized in children’s books, as some of the values impact negatively on the children. Tucker’s observation refers to children in general. We are however concerned with how this internalization may affect the girl child in particular, thus our interest in investigating what reading material is exposed to her. Similarly, Benton and Fox (1985) examine the responses of children to stories and poems. Their conclusion is that children project through their behaviour what they read in a story and through such projection, one determines the kind of image they form out of the story. This is further evidence that children internalize what they read. Consequently, we may draw the conclusion that children are influenced by what they read. A negative portrayal of the girl character may also affect the girl reader negatively.

Githiora (1979) is concerned with how children's worldview is, has been or can be influenced by ideas derived from literature. She argues that what children
read in their formative years can have a very telling effect on their attitudes and actions later in life. She goes on to quote Wa Thiong’o (1978:7):

> It is the values that people have that are the basis of their collective and individual image of self, their identity as a people, since culture is an ideological expression of the totality of their activities.

If, as Wa Thiong’o says, a people’s image of self and their worldview depends on the values they have, the girl child as a member of the society will be affected by the same values. So, if the values of the said people place the woman in an inferior position to that of the man, the girl child will take this as the truth. She may therefore grow up with the feeling that she is inferior.

Githiora’s views tally with those of Micere Mugo (1978) when the latter asserts that what is implanted in the mind through reading may form a permanent impression on the young mind. This observation brings the writer into focus. It meanwhile throws caution to the writers of children’s books about the impression they try to create on the children. The argument here is that books carry values that the writer wants to propagate. These values impress on the character of the child thus influencing him/her negatively or positively.

Micere Mugo (1978:34) comments further on impressions created on the mind by the writer. She cites Rider Haggard’s "Gagool" in *King Solomon's Mines*, as having influenced her image of an African woman in old age and how this figure of Gagool haunted her for a long time. "It is only recently," she says, "that I have got over my dread and fear of old black women."
The power of the writer to create an impression on the mind of the reader places him/her in a very significant position. Wa Thiong’o (1978:4) underscores the role of the writer in society:

A writer is trying to persuade us, to make us view not only certain kind of reality, but also from a certain angle of vision... seen from this light the product of the writer’s pen both reflects reality and attempts to persuade us to take a certain attitude to that reality. The persuasion can be a direct or indirect appeal through influencing the imaginations, feelings and actions of the recipient.

The power of the writer to persuade the reader to accept reality from a particular angle interests us in this study due to the influence this may have on the girl child if the writer decided to perpetuate the patriarchal stereotypes about girl children in their writings. As Cass (1967:78) argues:

By their enjoyment of books even at this stage without realizing it, children will perhaps unconsciously acquire certain fundamental feelings in regard to literature and life.

Cass’ point is significant as caution on how books influence children. Children take as reality what they read from books. They then internalize this and it forms part of their behaviour through projection. But Cass’ argument is directed at children in general. We are interested in this attitudinal influence on girl children in particular because this is the group that is normally the real victim of patriarchal stereotypes.

Ngugi Njoroge (1978:40) takes an insightful look into literature as an image forming force. He reiterates that: “Literature, whether for children or adults,
incorporates powerful image forming forces.” Njoroge also examines the changes that literature for children in Kenya has undergone and how it has been manipulated to “either boost or destroy image and dignity of a people.” But the work does not examine in detail, the portrayal of characters. It however gives us some insight into the role of the writer and the power of the written word. We get the understanding that what one reads forms an impression on him or her. From Njoroge’s argument we also get the impression that the writer’s word, which portrays a character either diminutively or superfluously is bound either way to create a negative impression. Thus, stereotypical portrayal of the girl character in the books children read may form the basis of their socialization due to the image formed from the readings. This necessitates critical examination of how the girl character is portrayed in the books availed to children.

Zolotov (1983-320) gives us insight into the nature of the child by drawing an analogy between writing for adults and writing for children:

Children’s book writing includes every category of adult writing that exists and everything that is true of distinctive writing for adults is also true of fine literature for children.

She however acknowledges the difference between adults and children when she says that children live at a more intense level than adults. Zolotov (1983-320) further observes that, "whatever is true of adults is true of children, only more so. They laugh, they cry, they love, they hate, they give, they take as adults do, only more so."
Even though Zolotov's argument only draws comparison between adults and children and does not refer to girl children in particular, it offers greater understanding of the nature of children. It stresses the need to understand the feelings of children and to interpret their responses critically. Because children respond so seriously to what they read, the effect that stereotypes may have on the girl child cannot be underestimated in a case where writers perpetuate them. It is only by understanding the nature of children that their needs can be correctly interpreted.

Ability to interpret children's needs correctly, is a necessary measure in sieving the kind of images incorporated in children's books. Herbst (1977:53) argues that the negative images presented in children's books may "... undermine the self confidence, encourage dependence and feelings of helplessness..." Even though Herbst's observations refer to children in general it serves as an important caution against negative images in children's books.

In his contribution to the issue of choice of reading material for the African children, P'Bitek (1973) stresses on the kind of literature with a strong cultural bias, thus, putting emphasis on the need to use literature to enhance our understanding of our culture. But care must be taken in adopting this kind of literature as P'Bitek recommends. This is because, as pointed out earlier many patriarchal African cultures are biased against women and girl children. So, many of them tend to extend their cultural stereotypes into literature and where
children's literature is involved, the girl character often suffers negative portrayal.

Other scholars who have expressed concern in the choice of reading materials for children include Kahenya (1992) and Mpesha (1995).

Kahenya (1992) in her analysis of Tintin comics and their relevance to the Kenyan child points out that children's literature is supposed to help them grow into socially acceptable and useful members of their society. She challenges Kenyan authors to carry out studies aimed at stressing the value factor in children's books. Kahenya’s stress on social acceptability is crucial. The girl child's social acceptability may depend on her upbringing. Stereotyping her is likely to stunt and warp her.

Mpesha (1995) in her survey of children's literature in Tanzania, points out that children prefer to identify with characters whose “traits” are recommended by society. This means that children take interest in the moral value factor. She further observes that most children will often identify with the characters if they are presented positively. She also says that as children listen to stories, they want to identify with the characters as they win battles after difficulties and live happily ever after. Mpesha’s observation could serve as a caution to writers on the kind of characters they try to create in their books. Since children identify with characters in the books they read, stereotypical portrayal of the girl character could occasion far-reaching effects.
Mpesha further takes interest in the audience of the writer of children’s books. She observes that an author of children’s books is dealing with an audience that can easily be influenced through reading. This observation is significant, for it underscores the need to critically analyse children’s books and come up with those that may not influence them negatively. Mpesha’s arguments, however, are based on findings among children in Tanzania. A similar study needs to be carried out in Kenya to establish the possibility of similar influence on the Kenyan child audience.

The need to establish the influence of literature on children is made much more urgent by Odaga’s (1985: xvii) revelation that:

The (contemporary) writers endeavour to draw directly from the local experiences and background of their readers. The emergent literature is therefore perpetuating common events and situations known to the local people.

Odaga’s observation is significant in revealing the writer’s source of material—the society. But given the way the patriarchal society views the woman, the question that comes to the mind is: are these writers endeavouring to change the way society viewed the woman and the girl child or are they just perpetuating the same patriarchal stereotypes about them? This question is crucial in view of Jakoyo’s (1998) observation in the People Magazine, August 14 - 20 1998, in which he quotes Lilian Oder’s argument in an unpublished seminar paper, that, unbalanced portrayal of the girl has great influence on the girl’s education and general development of the girl in society.
The realization that, portraying the girl in an unbalanced way can affect her education and general development has prompted interest among scholars and other bodies to want to quantify the portrayal of female characters in a number of media. Anna Obura (1991) has looked at the portrayal of girls and women in Kenyan textbooks. She observes that male characters are used more in the textbooks than female characters. The Kenya Oral Literature Association (KOLA) has also sponsored a review of a cross-section of children's readers, whose findings reveal that the majority of the books depict a male world. But the two analyses are of a general nature, as they discuss female characters in general. Our study focuses on girl characters in children's storybooks by selected Kenyan writers.

Moreover, Bali (1993), Kabira and Muthoni (1994) and Kabira, Masinjila and Mbegua (1994) have separately compiled and edited essays on various aspects touching on the position on girls and women in society. Their analyses tally on the fact that girls and women in a patriarchal society are under-privileged. But these works do not focus on the portrayal of girl characters in children's books, thus necessitating this study.

Two of the works in our primary reading list have been subjected to analysis. Weche (2000) examines *Fine Feathers* and *Settling the Score*. Even though his work is of a general nature and does not concentrate on the girl character, his section on characterization gives us some insight into character portrayal in children's books.
This study therefore serves as a necessary means of examining how girl characters are portrayed in children’s books by Kenyan writers.

1.5 Rationale

Okolie's (1998) observation that the child makes the adult is significant. Indeed the girl makes the woman. When people concentrate on examining women characters alone, they overlook other aspects that made one a woman. They forget that the woman is an end product of the girl. Society expects a responsible woman and mother. To realize this we have been interested in the woman in the making, thus the girl child.

Our view is that the kind of beliefs and attitudes the society inculcates into the girl child are likely to spill over into her adult life. If the girl develops a negative attitude of herself and society, chances are that we would soon talk of an adult woman with a negative attitude of herself and the society. This is why we have taken interest in the kind of influence the girl child is exposed to through reading.

But as hinted in the “statement of the problem”, scholars have concentrated on examining how the woman character is portrayed in adult literary works. For instance, Kiai (1992) has examined the portrayal of Wanja in Wa Thiong’o’s Petals of Blood. Other scholars have examined the portrayal of women in adult drama, for instance, Ciarunji Chesaina (1988) has looked at women characters in Imbuga’s drama. The studies cited above focus on adult characters. A study
focusing on children characters is therefore long overdue. This is because childhood is an important stage and what children read in their tender years has much influence on them as children and as adults in future. As Benton and Fox (1985) observe, children internalize what they read in books and try to project it through their behaviour. The implication of Benton and Fox’s observation is that children’s behaviour can be shaped by what they read. So, there is need to critically examine characterization in children’s books, with a view of finding out how the characters are portrayed in these books, and how the child reader could be affected.

The investigation into how the girl character is portrayed is projected to help patrons of children’s books in selecting for Kenyan children, those books which do not perpetuate stereotypes that may affect the girl child negatively. Publishers should also find the study useful in their selection of manuscripts before publication. To the writers, this study serves to create awareness on the suitability of books for Kenyan children; books that will not bolster male chauvinism in boys while instilling a sense of inferiority in girls. Parents and teachers could also benefit from the study when it comes to the selection of children’s reading materials.

1.6 Research Assumptions

This study is guided by the following assumptions:

1. Writers as members of the societies in which they live are influenced by the values that their societies uphold and this is reflected in their works.
2. Illustrations used in children’s books tend to depict the girl as subordinate to and dependent on the boy to coincide with the society’s construction of gender roles.

1.7 Aims and Objectives of the Study

This study attempts:

1. To examine how Kenyan writers of children’s books have employed style to paint a particular image of the girl character.

2. To predict the effect this portrayal may have on the girl reader.

3. To subject the portrayal of the girl characters in the selected books to literary criticism and collate any emerging trends.

1.8 Research Methodology

This study employs textual analysis to examine the portrayal of girl characters in children’s books and supplements this with interviews with selected authors. Before conducting a critical analysis of the style and characterization of the books, we carried out a thorough reading of the selected texts by different Kenyan writers of children’s books.

In our textual analysis we employed the “ABC of Gender Analysis” framework as proposed by Kabira and Masinjila (1997:11) as our tool of data analysis. The framework operates on the premise that “reducing a text to its smaller components and systematically analysing it, enables one to understand the
interrelations within the text and the underlying implications.” Under this framework a narratological analysis involving quantitative and qualitative data is carried out through answering set out questions as explained below. While quantitative data seeks to answer the question “What gender gaps exist and to what extent?” Qualitative analysis examines the possible implications of the gender gaps to the reader.

In order to carry out comprehensive reading, and a critical analysis of the books, we were guided by the questions in Appendix 1, constructed in line with the ABC of Gender Analysis module. We assumed that the selected texts would be able to answer all or some of our listed questions. So, during our reading process of each text, we made continued reference to the questions and took data of instances when any section of the texts responded to any of the questions.

When all the data on the selected texts had been compiled, we analysed it to determine the gender responsiveness of the individual texts. We, for instance, sorted out those items that propagated unbalanced portrayal of the girl character vis-à-vis the boy character. We also isolated the items that gave a balanced portrayal of both the girl and boy characters. By quantifying and collating the collected data, we were able to establish whether the writers were trying to emancipate the girl character or whether they perpetuated society’s age old beliefs that view the girl child as inferior to the boy child.
In order to find out whether the writers consciously tried to create a particular image of girl characters, by portraying them the way they did, we interviewed selected writers; Alembi, Imbuga and Orchardson-Mazrui. The results of the interview helped to confirm our research assumptions. During the interview, we were guided by the interview guide questions in Appendix 2.

Our selection of the books and the writers was done purposively. Peter (1994:75) says of purposive sampling:

A purposive sample is obtained when a researcher uses his own expert judgement and purpose to decide whom to select into his sampling.

In our choice of texts, we considered a number of factors. All the selected books are written by Kenyan writers. We were also interested in the chief protagonists in the books. Though most of the selected books feature girls as the main characters, some books either have the girl juxtaposed with the boy or as it happens in some titles, the books feature boys. Selecting books with both girl and boy characters was to help us in comparing how the same writer portrays the girl and boy in the same text, or the girl in one text and the boy in another. For instance, both titles by Kamau are adventure stories set in the forest. How does the portrayal of the girl Wangui in *Little Wangui* compare with that of the boy Pongo in *Adventures of Pongo and Uncle Talema*?

Our sampling of the writers is aimed at drawing representation over a period stretching from the sixties to the close of the century. This period covers the pioneer writers like Pamela Kola and Asenath Odaga to the most recent, like E.
Alembi and Orchardson-Mazrui. The earliest book in our selection, *Jande's Ambition* was authored in 1966, just before the gender euphoria of the seventies. Other titles, *The Villager's Son* and *The Poor Child* were written in 1971 and 1988 respectively. The rest of the selected titles were written in the nineties when as Akoleit (1990) points out, scholars had started showing interest in children's literature. It is also a period of noted active existence of KOLA and FAWE both of which have advocated for greater and more positive participation of women and girls in literature and education respectively.

For the sake of comparison between men and women writers' views, we sampled four for each category. Alembi, Imbuga, Kamau and Mailu represent men writers while Kola, Odaga, Orchardson-Mazrui and M.I. Moraa represent women writers. For each writer, two comparative texts or stories are chosen, one featuring the girl as the main character and the other the boy. This is to help us in comparing the portrayal of the girl character vis-à-vis the boy character. However, in the case of Moraa, Imbuga and Orchardson-Mazrui, only one text was available by each of the three writers. But since we find their books crucial to our study, we selected them.

Apart from reading the selected texts, we also examined available literary works on children's literature and those on literature in general. Information gained from the reading helped us to gauge so as to gauge the relationship, between material on literary criticism, with that in the sampled books and in other works on children's literature. Our material on literary criticism was
drawn from Moi Library of Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library of University of Nairobi, Alliance High School Library and other relevant sources.

1.9 Scope and Limitations

Our study is limited to selected Kenyan writers of children’s books and the titles selected for each writer. A list of the writers and titles is provided in the introduction. The eight sampled writers are a selection from a wide range of Kenyan writers of storybooks for children. It was possible to select other writers such as Nyambura Mpesha, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Jimmi Makotsi, Ruth Makotsi, Maida Makotsi, Taita Towett, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, Joseph Magut, David Mulwa, Meja Mwangi, Mureithi C.M., Makumi I, Anne Matindi, Clare Omanga, Leo Odera and Benjamin Wegesa among others. However in trying to work within a manageable scope, we left out their books from our selection for various reasons. For instance, Ngugi wa Thiong’o's books in Njamba Series feature only boy characters, while the folk-tale category like Clare Omanga's *The Girl who could not keep a Secret* are already represented by Kamau's *Little Wangui* and Kola's *The Wise Little Girl*. Adventure stories like Wegesa's *Captured by Raiders* are represented by books like *Little Wangui, The Adventures of Mekatilili, Settling the Score and Adventures of Pongo and Uncle Talema*.

Other writers like Joseph Kabui have authored anthologies, for instance *The Coconut Girl*. This category of books, however, is represented by Moraa's
Magic Stone and Kola's The Wise Little Girl. Mpesha's Junior Pilot would have made an appropriate choice but I could not select it because the author was my supervisor. Otherwise, our selection is adequately representative.

Some of the sampled writers have written extensively for children. Odaga, Alembi, Maillu and Kola are prolific writers of children's books. But, we preferred only the sampled titles because they fit in well with our study. Imbuga, Moraa and Orchardson-Mazrui have not established themselves as renowned writers for children, but we wanted to draw on their experience as first time writers for children and compare them with those of established writers in the area of children's literature. However, Imbuga, like Maillu, has written extensively for adults and, given the significant difference between adult and children writing, we wanted to find out if the two writers would appeal to children readers. The choice of Kamau is of special interest to us because both his books are adventure stories in the forest. We were interested in establishing how the same writer portrays the girl, as compared to the boy, in more or less similar settings. Furthermore both stories are based on folktales. The same applies to Moraa's The Magic Stone. This gives us the interest to find out the extent to which the writers conform to or deviate from societal folklore.

For Pamella Kola, one book is chosen but it contains two separate stories the first featuring a boy and a girl and the second a girl alone. So, in essence, the two stories offer two different analyses.
Thus our study is limited to examining the portrayal of girl characters in children’s storybooks by Kenyan writers of whom the sampled ones above are representative. The boy character is often mentioned, purposefully to highlight the portrayal of the girl character.
2.0 Introduction

Characterization in a work of art comprises the persons through whom the writer speaks to his reader. E. M. Forster (1927:44) calls them “word masses” of whom he says:

... created by a novelist who gives them names and sex, assigns them plausible gestures, and causes them to speak by the use of inverted commas, and perhaps to behave consistently. These word masses are his characters.

Characterization forms a major part of a book. E. M. Forster (1927) hints on the importance of characterization when he says that it is through it that the writer is able to appeal to the intelligence and imagination of the reader, as the latter seeks to find out, to whom the action happened. Forster’s observation underscores the importance of characterization in arousing and sustaining the interest of the reader.

Forster also talks about the “story” and “plot”. He argues that the story appeals to memory while plot to intelligence. The story is important to children, for them to follow the book. But since the story is normally told through the characters in a book, this places characterization at the centre of a child’s reading.
E. M. Forster (1927:47) further talks of flat and round characters. "While flat characters do not grow or change, round characters develop with the story." Round characters in a story help the child reader to learn and develop with one's protagonist.

Other scholars who concur with Forster on the significance of characterization in a story include J. Hawthorne. Hawthorne (1985:40) observes that "...characters can be used to tell a story; to exemplify a belief; to contribute to a symbolic pattern in a work, or to facilitate a particular plot development." Hawthorne's observation reveals that characterization plays a multi-faceted role in a story. Furthermore, for readers to be fully involved in a story, they normally look for characters in the story with whom to identify. Young readers particularly want to closely accompany their favourite characters through the story, overcoming obstacles with them. Arbuthnot and Sutherland (1947:27) succinctly point this out when they say:

Children want heroes who have obstacles to overcome, conflicts to settle, difficult goals to win. It is the vigorous action in pursuit of these goals that keeps young readers racing along from page to page to find out how the hero achieves his ends. But to achieve he must in some way or other.

In children's literature, the clearing of obstacles by the hero/heroine is an affirmation of human potential. Indeed as Kahenya (1992) observes, the solving of problems confirms that it is humanly possible to succeed in both practical and emotional ways. Moreover, the interest of young readers in overcoming obstacles alongside their heroes/heroines, creates a close affinity
between them as readers and their favoured characters. Since children want role models in the books they read, it could be natural that they try to shape their behaviour to conform to the qualities exhibited by their heroes/heroines. However, as Mpesha (1995) points out, children prefer to identify with characters whose traits are recommended by society. This confirms children’s interest in moral values. In the course of their reading, children will also be looking for credibility in their favourite characters. Writers therefore need to create credible characters in their books, in order for children to identify with them. Huck (1976:9) says that, “the credibility of characters will depend upon the author’s ability to show their true natures, their strengths and their weaknesses.” Huck’s comments could serve as a challenge to writers to create familiar, realistic and acceptable characters.

This chapter looks into the nature of characters propagated in children’s books. To do this, we carry out an examination of character portrayal based on the parameters of sex and gender. We particularly examine the relationship between the two parameters and roles that authors assign their characters, thus answering a pertinent question:

What is the relationship between girl character portrayal in books and the gender roles that society prescribes for women and girls?

2.1 Portrayal Based on Sex

In looking at the premise of sex, this chapter adopts Fawe’s (1998) description of sex, adopted from A. Oakley (1972), who says:
"Sex" refers to the state, the quality of being male or female and to the biological features that accompany being male or female. Sex thus implies a natural division between the most basic physiological differences of males and females, these differences being genetically determined; largely universal, and generally constant.

This view considers sex as a category distinguishing males from females in terms of biological characteristics which may be listed under two considerations. These are: one, the secondary sex characteristics such as women having breasts and men growing beards or developing a deep voice, and two, the physiological functions like pregnancy, giving birth or breast feeding for women while the men are associated with reproduction. The latter functions are referred to in this chapter as "sex roles".

Portrayal based on sex thus entails physical or tangible attributes, which the writer apportions his/her characters on the basis of anatomy and sex roles. In attempting to portray the maleness or femaleness of their characters, writers often use the attributes of physical features and physical strength, as expounded in the subsequent sections.

2.1.1 Physical Features

The attribute of physical features is used here to refer to the way a writer describes his/her characters in relation to their body build. We realize that by referring to physical features, the writer distinguishes female characters from male characters by associating particular attributes to femaleness or maleness.

In *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, Muyeye, a male, is contrasted with Mbodza
and Matsezi, females, by physical and related attributes. While Muyeye is big and strong, bold and fearless, Mbodza and Matsezi are beautiful and brave, tall and graceful.

Orchardson-Mazrui’s differentiative description of the male and female is possibly an extension of the society’s view of what is male or what is female. In a patriarchal society like the Kenyan one, male physique is exclusively big, strong and unconquerable, while the female is invariably frail and vulnerable. The assumed vulnerability of the female is perhaps what is often used to justify the societal view that women or girls always need the physical protection of the men or boys. Benjamin Odhonji (1994:56) observes that among the Luo, women and girls are “... regarded as frail and weak parties who need constant masculine care and protection.” Mazrui however deviates from this social stand when her main character, Mekatilili, categorically refuses masculine protection: “I don’t want you to keep an eye on me, Mwadori. I’m not a baby! I can take care of myself!” p58. She similarly retorts; “I don’t need you to look after me, Mwadori... I don’t need a boy to look after me, thank you!” p126. In essence, Mekatilili’s stand is an attempt to dispel the notion of presumed frailty of the girls.

Another feature that is apparently attributed only to the female characters is that of beauty. Obera in The Wise Little Girl is portrayed as beautiful. Indeed her name “Obera” itself means beautiful. Matsezi’s daughter in The Adventures of Mekatilili, is described as “gorgeous, with a neck as graceful as a gazelle’s. The daughter whose eyes sparkle like stars, and whose skin is soft and as
brown as honey,” p47. Similarly Mekatilili and Mbobza are both described as being pretty.

However, what is most noteworthy is the affinity between beauty and gracefulness. For instance, a girl will be beautiful and graceful, as in the case of Matsezi’s daughter. One could argue that being portrayed as “beautiful and graceful”, is the compensation the girl character gets for being denied other qualities like “big and strong”. And, as seen about Matsezi’s daughter, her skin is soft and brown. This spiced description of the girl character easily combines with adjectives like “sympathetic” and “kind”, as seen in the case of Wangui in *Little Wangui*, until the process yields the term *submissive*. The process could be illustrated thus: Beautiful–graceful–sympathetic–kind–soft–dependent–yielding/submissive. Masinjila’s observations quoted in FEMNET (1994:4) lends support to our illustration when he points out that:

... references made to females vary from negative association with beauty, humorous naivete, fragility, fragrance, delicacy, weakness, sweetness, and generally with a heavy dose of sensuality.

In the above observation, Masinjila refers to the way females are viewed in a patriarchal society. The females in this kind of socialization, internalize these prescribed associations and take them as the societal norms and expectations. Their character and roles in society are, thus greatly dictated by these associations, as they strive to live up to the society’s expectations.

Similarly, many other physical features that are shared by males and females, have been feminized and are now used to heighten female beauty. For instance,
Mekatilili in *The Adventures of Mekatilili* is considered beautiful owing to the dimples that appear in her cheeks when she smiles, while Chizi is pretty because of the gap between her upper teeth. None of the examined books seems to take interest in such features on males. However, when the facial features of the male characters are described, it is only to point out negative aspects like the "rough, mean-looking" faces of Simon's captors in Alembi's *Mistaken Identity*, or an "ugly scar" across the face of one of the men holding Ojango in *Settling the Score*.

Certain ornaments and dressing have also been associated with femininity. Even though both men and women in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, wear bracelets or even beads, the writer's interest is only in those worn by women. These are viewed as enhancing the woman's beauty. Similarly, their ornaments are described in bright multi-colours as opposed to those worn by men.

It is our view that the very notion of emphasizing the aspect of beauty in connection with females is the society's way of making women and girls consider qualities such as sturdiness, aggressiveness, militancy or being muscular, as masculine qualities, thus undesirable for a female, who should be graceful and submissive. It is then quite possible that a muscular and strong woman may be tempted to feign weakness in the presence of men as a way of affirming her femininity.
2.1.2 Physical Strength

As previously pointed out, a patriarchal society trains its females towards dependency on masculine protection. The female is not supposed to exhibit physical strength. On the contrary, males are inducted into the warrior culture and taught to detest any association with female weakness. Seeing themselves as the bona fide protectors of the female kind, the males also see it as their prime duty to ensure that they subdue the females under their jurisdiction. This state of affairs becomes the point of departure for the writer, who extracts his/her characters from the society.

We may assume that, it is against this background of female subservience to males that Aloo in The Wise Little Girl, does not do anything to defend herself against her brother’s mistreatment. Even though Oloo is not necessarily bigger or stronger than Aloo, the latter can only roll all over the floor, pleading with the former to desist from beating her. Quite unable to even scream for help, Aloo lets Oloo whip her until the piece of stick breaks into two. In a patriarchal warrior culture such as cited by Odhonji in FEMNET (1994), Oloo is a total man, able to subdue a female, while on the other hand, Aloo is playing her role within the expected precincts of the said subservience and submissiveness.

The societal myth of masculine protection of girls and women is seen on several occasions. When the boy in love with Matsezī’s daughter in The Adventures of Mekatilili goes into Matsezī’s compound, the latter and her daughters have to scream for help from the sons, p48. Earlier on, it is Mwadori
who attacks the snake while Mekatilili stands rooted to the ground, sweating with fright, p29. Meanwhile, Sangao in *Jande’s Ambition*, always feels responsible for his sister, Jande. For this reason, he always walks closely behind her, to and from school, supposedly to guard her against any harm.

The need to protect the girls is apparently necessitated by their presumed weakness. Jande, for instance, cannot cope with the demanding school life due to her being weak. She even finds it difficult to wake up early and Sangao must always assist her, p33. Similarly, Aloo in *the Wise Little Girl*, can only milk Openda which does not kick. She is unable to milk the other cows which need strength to be handled. So the cows remain unmilked until Olool comes back.

Meanwhile, Mekatilili in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, cannot walk for as long as the boy, Mwadori. Mekatilili keeps displaying signs of tiredness unlike Mwadori who can still walk on, p30. The girl and boy are about agemates but unlike Mekatilili, Mwadori shows remarkable powers of endurance, presumably because he is a boy.

Mekatilili’s brothers discourage her from taking interest in hunting. “Hunting is too dangerous for girls. What if a lion or hyena or buffalo attacks?” p11 The boys discourage Mekatilili from hunting because she will not be able to defend herself in case of an attack. When Mekatilili challenges them if they could defend themselves in case they themselves were attacked, Kazungu says he would climb a tree. “But what will you do? You are a girl!” he wonders. When
Mekatilili insists on going hunting, Karisa tells her in disgust: “You should have been born a boy not a girl!”

The boys feel disgusted with Mekatilili for engaging in an activity that calls for strength and bravery. A show of strength or bravery is not expected of a girl. In Mekatilili’s community, the boys are admired for their strength, skill and bravery while the girls are admired for their beauty and intelligence. Could there be something wrong with Mekatilili, who wants to show her strength and bravery?

The attributes of a girl and a boy are clearly contrasted in the characters of Tecla in _Fine Feather_ and Ojango in _Settling the Score_. Though the two characters are a creation of the same writer, the naivete and helplessness of the girl, Tecla, contrast sharply with the boy, Ojango’s agility of mind and bravery. Tecla is completely unable to take care of herself and the property entrusted to her. She is so easily outwitted by the young man who steals her _kiondo_. On his part, Ojango takes quick action in trying to protect his father’s goats against the five masked men. He dares the thieves and attacks them in an effort to recover his father’s stolen goats. Ojango even manages to fight with the giant python that had got the five ruffians fleeing and climbing up trees. The boy displays enormous courage and endurance. Ojango’s strength is sustained despite much beating, long walking, hunger and the cold, until he manages to have the gangsters arrested. On her part, Tecla is even unable to identify the thief of her _kiondo_.

Like Mekatilili in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, who sweats with fright on seeing a snake, and shivers at the story of kidnappers, or gets scared when spirits are mentioned, Tecla is shocked at any display of violence and she breaks down to cry when the thief of her *kiondo* is treated roughly.

The girl, Wangui, in *Little Wangui* however, contrasts this image of a girl as a weakling. In her adventures, Wangui is able to overcome many obstacles on her own. When her beloved little dog is chased into the lake by a leopard cub, Wangui dives into the dragon-infested lake to save her pet from drowning. Swimming strongly and fast, Wangui is able to catch up with the canoe which had floated a long way from the bank due to strong winds. Single-handed, she tries to paddle the canoe back to the land. The winds however are so strong that her canoe is driven to a strange land. Wangui remains strong and unscarred even in the strange place with no people except for one crippled old woman.

In the strange land, Wangui undertakes the mission of securing medicine for the sick woman. This involves many days of walking far and fast through forests full of wild animals and man eating giants. Wangui bravely and strongly endures these dangers until she manages to retrieve the needed medicine which is guarded by ten fierce and hungry giants.

Similarly, Mekatilili's captors in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, attest to her physical strength when Muhonja appeals to his colleague: “Kombo, take her hand. She is too much for me. I've never known a child of her age to be so strong. Take her hand!” p82. Then on her way back to Kaya Fungo after her
captivity at the mission, Mekatilili is determined to prove to the *nyere* guards that she is not a weakling. She refuses to be carried despite her blistered and sore feet, p120.

Later, when Mekatilili’s brothers agree to teach her how to shoot using a bow and arrow, they are fascinated by her ability to learn. Soon her aims are as good as those of the boys and she is able to hit the target each time, p13. This way, Mekatilili is able to prove that given the opportunity, girls can perform as well as boys. Apparently, that also shows that society suppresses girl children, denying them the opportunity to express their true abilities. Such denial is seen when Yakaho in *Adventures of Pongo and Uncle Talema* is refused permission to join men in the war: “No, the journey will be too dangerous for girls to accompany us,” replied Uncle Talema. Yakaho feels disappointed because she had been enthusiastic to join in the war. Since society expects girls to be coy, their true character is often not known. Mbodza, one of Mekatilili’s friends, for instance, was usually very sweet. However, Chizi cautions Mekatilili about Mbodza’s other side when she says: “When she gets angry you better watch out! She is like a lion,” p112.

Chizi’s remark about Mbodza reveals that the latter possesses enormous strength and could display it if she chose to. However, Mbodza chooses to inhibit her strength, conceivably as a way of conforming to societal expectations of female sweetness and coyness. This in essence may be suggesting that females do not accept masculine protection as compensation for their lack of physical strength. Rather, this protection is a societal prescription
which girl children are socialized to believe in. They, thus, grow up accepting it and depending on it. But, Mekatilili tries to deviate from this culture, when she refuses Mwadori’s protection and declares that she can protect herself.

2.2 Portrayal Based on Gender

Gendered portrayal of characters in books tends towards abstract attributes. It addresses psychical and attitudinal values in society. While discussing sex, we used the term to refer to maleness or femaleness of an individual and conceded that this is biologically dictated. One’s gender however is an ideological construct which society applies to draw differentiations between the qualities it considers appropriate for a man or for a woman. Based on that premise, society spells out roles which are categorized as duties for men or duties for women. For instance, in many communities, kitchen work is a duty for women and girls, while hunting or looking after livestock are categorized as jobs for men and boys, as seen in duty distribution between Omori and Paositina in *The Magic Stone* p40. With time, these duties have been identified with the sexes of their performers so that for instance, cooking is considered feminine while hunting is masculine.

Our examination of character portrayal under gender, therefore, examines the premise under three differentiative approaches: cultural approach, social approach and habitual approach.
2.2.1 Cultural Approach

The cultural dimension in this study considers the way society draws on myths, beliefs, attitudes and the historical factors to define societal norms and moral obligations. It is notable that through these parameters society endeavours to explain, justify and enhance the existing social status, including its stand on roles for girls and women.

Under cultural portrayal, we look at the extent to which characterization in children’s storybooks either conforms to or deviates from the society’s prescription of women’s roles in general and girls’ roles in particular.

As given exposition by Njau (1994), a man in a traditional patriarchal society is considered the head of the family and defender of the community. His roles therefore include decision making, feeding the family, protecting the family and providing shelter for the family. The woman on her part is expected to perform domestic chores. In addition, both are also expected to play their respective roles as father or mother and husband or wife. Under this social set-up, girls are socialized to be good mothers and wives while boys are trained to behave as husbands, fathers, custodians of community safety and keepers of community secrets.

Due to their duty specifications, the locus of the man’s working is outdoors: hunting, looking after animals, looking for materials for building or meeting other men to discuss community matters. The woman meanwhile will be at
home looking after the family, preparing meals, fetching water and weeding in the family garden. When therefore Uncle Talema in *Adventures of Pongo and Uncle Talema*, assigns Yakaho to remain and help the Guardian’s wife, while he goes out with Pongo, Yakaho does not complain, though she had wanted to accompany the two. It is also quite expected when Aloo in *The Wise Little Girl*, remains to work on the piece of land around the home as her brother goes out to look after the big herd of cattle that their father left, p1.

In an effort to play their part as good mothers, women ensure that their daughters are trained in their roles. Jande’s mother in *Jande’s Ambition*, assigns Jande to remain with her in the house as Sangao goes with his father out into the fields, p16. Being a girl, Jande is made to remain at home to learn the duties her mother considers appropriate for women and girls. Jande’s mother does not even approve of her being taken to school, as this prevents Jande from learning her roles as a woman, p36. But, Jande’s sister, Mary, is on the “right path”, because she does not go to school. She instead helps at home and baby sits for her aunt, p37.

Given the duty of mothers to their girl children, Mekatiliki in *The Adventures of Mekatiliki* finds herself in trouble with her mother over cooking. “I’m ashamed to tell people that you don’t know how to cook. From now on, you will have to stay at home and help me”, p15. Mekatiliki’s mother has to move fast because it would not be acceptable to learn that Mekatiliki does not know how to cook yet the main duty of girls prescribed by society is to cook and serve men. In any occasion that entails cooking and serving, such as the *liauka* ceremony in
Kagai and her Brothers, young women are selected and assigned the tasks, since these are considered jobs for women.

Since they have been trained to believe that domestic chores are their duty, the girls have a strong obligation to perform them. Jande in Jande’s Ambition, feels guilty for not helping in the house, p9. Mekatilili in The Adventures of Mekatilili, feels guilty for not helping with the washing of dishes and tidying the compound, p5. Meanwhile, Mwende in The Poor Child, understands that it is her duty to collect firewood, fetch water, wash clothes and, being a girl, she should also know how to prepare the gourd for carrying water, p14. Even though Mwende stays with her stepbrothers, who are as big as herself, she does not expect them to help in these tasks. When she complains of getting no help from her stepbrother, Kilundo, her stepmother retorts: “You’re not a boy. Why should you compare yourself with Kilundo?” p19.

Since society conceives the roles of boys differently from those of girls, it tries to define a different world for boys and another for girls. Due to such demarcations, Mekatilili in The adventures of Mekatilili, is often restrained from keeping the company of her brothers, p14. By following her brothers, Mekatilili is bound to learn or get used to the activities meant for boys, such as hunting or climbing trees. Mekatilili’s mother is unequivocal about what she expects of her sons and what she expects of her daughters. “The boys herd the animals and go hunting for food. And they help with farm work. Mekatilili, you have to fetch water and collect firewood, and you have to learn to cook! That is the way it has always been. Everyone has a duty to perform,” p15.
When Mekatilili is kidnapped and taken to the mission centre she finds that even there, life is patterned. The girls have to do the sewing while the boys do woodwork. Elsewhere, the pattern is about the same. The boys in Kagai and her Brothers, go out exploring while Kagai has to remain at home. In Jande's Ambition, Sangao is encouraged to go to school as Jande is expected to stay at home. In essence, the place for girls and women in general is at home.

Society seems to put emphasis on the assumed inferiority of the girl to the boy. The presumed weaknesses of the girl and her need to depend on the boy are given repeated exposition. Society tries to draw the kind of parallels found between Mwende in The Poor Child and Kamwaki in The Priceless Gift. Mwende and Kamwaki are both creations of the same writer. But, while Kamwaki is portrayed as daring and curious, Mwende is a pitiable character, depicted as stupid and clumsy.

Apparently, being aware of the society's view of girls, the boys form an opinion about what the role of a girl should be. Tom in The Priceless Gift reveals his opinion of girls when he tells Kamwaki: "A man shouldn't be scared of such small things. You behave like a girl ..."p21. The implication of Tom's remark is that only girls can be scared. This is another insinuation on the purported weakness and helplessness of girls. We could guess that this may be one of the reasons why girls and women in general should stay at home, while the boys and men go out into the fields.
Ironically, as much as the home is a place for girls and women, it belongs to the man. As Njau (1994) points out, culturally all property belongs to the man and the woman is not allowed to inherit or own any. Indeed, when Aloo in *The Wise Little Girl*, differs with her brother, the latter decides to send her away from home and although their home has many cattle and other property, Aloo is only allowed her blanket, sleeping mat and a gourd filled with milk. The simple possessions that Aloo leaves with are seemingly her only right.

Jande in *Jande’s Ambition*, however contradicts the picture of female weakness, when she beats her brother in physical activities like climbing trees which society demarcates as a preserve for boys. Even though Sangao hates to be beaten by a girl, he has to concede defeat again when Jande rides a donkey without being taught, when he himself is even afraid to start.

Furthermore, Jande again disapproves the notion that girls are only meant for marriage, or that they can not manage at school, when she turns down marriage offers, p60, and excels at school, p63. Jande gets encouraged when her headmistress at Ramo assures the girls that they could do as well as the boys in class work. She also enjoys her brother’s support and encouragement. Sangao seems to hold a different view from that of the rest of the society about the ability of girls. After succeeding in getting his sister transferred from the Weaving Centre back to school, Sangao tells Jande: “We can’t waste brains, even if they belong to a girl,” p41.
Similarly, Mekatilili in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, rebels against the culture of ‘home for girls and outdoors for boys.’ “Why do girls have to be the ones to stay at home, mama? Why do girls have to be the ones to fetch water and collect firewood? Can’t boys do those duties as well? ... Why can’t I help to herd and to hunt?” p15.

Although she is made to stay at home most of the time, Mekatilili displays vast knowledge of her people’s customs. She challenges Mwadori to it when the latter begins imagining that only boys are in a position to know about the customs, p27. When she is challenged about her desire to explore, Mekatilili replies: “But that is how I learn about all sorts of things, Grandmother. I learn about trees and plants and about birds and animals, even insects. If I stay around the house everyday, when shall I ever learn anything except how to collect firewood and fetch water?” p58.

Mekatilili is justified in her argument because the people expect her to be a leader and healer. Indeed when her grandmother sends her to go and gather some plants for preparing medicine for a sick child, she expects Mekatilili to know which plants and from where to get them. This points to the dual character of the society. The very society that wants to shut Mekatilili indoors is the same society that expects her to be informed about things outdoors.

### 2.2.2 Social Approach

We concede that there is close proximity between the social approach to portrayal of characters and the cultural approach previously discussed.
However, the social dimension deals with the portrayal of characters in relation to the day-to-day activities and behaviour of individuals as they interact in a society with prescribed norms, ethics and general expectations. The approach also considers the specific roles society assigns to individuals, the behaviour of the individual in relation to their assigned roles and how this relationship between behaviour and the roles is reflected through characterization in books.

Citing the case of Tecla in *Fine Feathers*, for instance, she has to turn down the offer of *mandazi* from the young man sitting next to her, as a sign of civility. Tecla knows that being a girl, she is not expected to show open interest in offers, especially from a man. Society expects her to display a certain degree of coyness to prove that she is not easily taken in. Her character for that matter remains shy and prim, such that she is not able to express herself. She keeps looking down and allowing the young man to take advantage of her shyness. This makes her unable to learn the character of the person she is dealing with. We would expect that if Tecla had some courage to look up at the young man as they talked, she would have discovered the cunning in his eyes, or noticed the way he was eyeing her *kiondo*.

In *Kisalu and his Fruit Garden*, Muthikwa cannot express her love for Kisalu even though she loves him so much. This probably is because in her community, just like Nana’s in *The Virtuous Woman* and many others, women and girls are not expected to express their love openly. If they did, society would see them as easy going or harlots. Even answering to a love proposal from a man in the affirmative, is considered outrageously unladylike. A proper
lady is expected to be coy in matters of man-woman relationships. In all matters the man seems to be in the lead, with the woman playing subsidiary roles. Even where the woman is fully concerned, the man still takes the leading role. For instance, when Uncle Talema, in *Adventures of Pongo and Uncle Talema*, proposes to Yakaho, it is the latter’s father who decides for her, while the village girl in *The Villager’s Son*, has no choice but to get married to the villager’s son who has finished school.

Another case of females playing insignificant roles is clearly illustrated in *Kagai and her Brothers*. From the title of this book, one would expect that Kagai plays a significant role. However, this is not the case. Apart from the few occasions when Kagai appears crying for porridge or sweets, or running away from a hen, the book is, in essence, about the two boys, Asena and Asembe who completely overshadow her. The boys are seen preparing for and going through the *lialuka* initiation ceremony. Later the two boys go visiting relatives and having fun while Kagai remains at home most of the time. This seems to fit in very well with the patriarchal tendency of wanting to “keep women out of prominence and out of influential sectors of life,” as observed by Masinjila (1994:1), when he says: “… men systematically keep women out of prominence in most of the influential sectors of society”.

In many cases, the presence of girls among boys is not acknowledged and may be ignored altogether. For instance, Muyeye and his two beautiful wives in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, had many beautiful daughters and nine sons, who were named Giriama, Digo, Duruma, Chonyi, Jibana, Ribe, Rabai, Kauma and
Kambe, p46. We realize that the nine names are what comprise the present nine Mijikenda clans, named after the nine sons. As for the many daughters, we are not introduced to any. Indeed when they are mentioned to us, it is through the admirers who want to marry them.

Socially, marriage is apparently the ultimate goal assigned to the girl child. This is why we can only refer to Muyeye’s daughters in terms of their marriageability: “many admirers wanted to marry Muyeye’s daughters,” p46; “the Oromo boys could not let those beautiful girls out of sight,” p46; “the boy walked up … and said, “I want to marry one of your gorgeous daughters,” p47; “Muyeye’s protest made him lose heart,” p47; “… and we must think about finding a husband for her soon,” she adds, p38. In The Wise Little Girl, Aloo’s aunt looks for a husband for her as soon as she has learnt to make baskets from reeds. Having learnt some trade, it is apparent that the next thing for Aloo is to get married.

Orchardson-Mazrui, however, in The Adventures of Mekatilili seems to disagree with this domesticated role for the girl child. She therefore presents Mekatilili as a prophesied leader of her people during the time of their greatest
need, p10. Following this prophecy, the child Mekatilili is born with qualities that transcend gender demarcations. She despises domestic oriented roles and aspires into the extra-domestic sphere. Mekatilili wants to explore, to hunt, to look after the animals – all the duties associated with boys and men, rather than just fetch water, collect firewood and cook. When given a chance, Mekatilili learns quite fast, how to shoot using a bow and arrow, a skill thought to belong to men and boys only.

When she is taken to the mission centre, she defies the rules there by insisting on wearing her bracelets and beads, since they are hers. She later denounces Mwadori’s protection over her, thus in essence toppling the patronage of men over women. Not only do her fellow girls admire and respect her, but also the boys get scared of Mekatilili’s piercing eyes which seem to command them to accept what she wants. For instance, Kazungu only accepts to teach Mekatilili how to shoot after being cowed by her gaze.

But Mekatilili is not the only girl who creates an impact in her male dominated society. Obera in *The Wise Little Girl* stuns men and women alike, with her healing prowess. At a tender age of two, Obera becomes a healer and her fame spreads so much that when the king’s medicine men are unable to treat him, she is the one called in to save his life. Everyone sings praises to the wise little girl. Obera is rewarded by the king for saving his life. So, her family becomes rich through her efforts.
Another success comes through Jande in *Jande’s Ambition*. Jande, for whom Miss Bennett serves as the role model, weathers all odds to become a successful teacher. Jande’s mother, aunt, uncle and all the neighbours are against her going to school. Instead, they recommend marriage for her. However, out of her own determination she is able to counter their opposition and continue with school until she achieves her ambition.

Similarly, the notion of men as the sole decision-makers and advisors gets a redefinition when Muthama in *The Poor Child*, seeks his daughter, Mwende’s advice before marrying Mukulu, her stepmother. Muthama only proceeds to marry Mukulu after Mwende advises him to do so. Similarly in *The Wise Little Girl*, Aloo who had despised, hated, even exiled his sister Aloo, discovers that she is the only one who could advise him on how to recover his lost favourite cow. Aloo forgives her brother the ills he had committed against her and helps him recover his cow, p12.

### 2.2.3 Habitual Approach

Under habitual approach in character portrayal, we take interest in how societal stereotypes are expressed through characterization in children’s books. As Allport (1954:188) says, “a stereotype acts both as a justificatory (sic) device for categorical acceptance or rejection of a group ...” But most importantly to us, he points out that stereotypes form pictures in the minds of both the instigator of the stereotype and its recipient. In a patriarchal set-up stereotypes are aimed at inculcating specific beliefs and attitudes in the minds of girl
children, so as to pattern their behaviour in a particular way. Through perpetuating particular stereotypes about females, society trains girl children to feel inferior to boy children. Quite often, girls and women in general are presented as emotionally weak, mentally inferior and physically dependent on boys or men. Masinjila quoted (1994:11) gives us insight into how men and women are viewed in a patriarchal society:

Men are regarded, within the patriarchal tradition as possessing reason, logic, intellect, egos, souls and strong wills. Women on the other hand, are emotional, given to capricious anger, chaotic and generally suffer from unbridled sexuality.

From Masinjila’s observation, we decipher that patriarchal societal set-ups do not perceive women and girls as rational beings. On the other hand, the males are considered to be rational and superior to the females.

The way the patriarchal society considers the males is aimed at building their self-esteem and giving them a psychological boost, while the females are socialized into a feeling of inadequacy, in order for them to keep looking up to men for support and completeness.

From time to time, this construct of male superiority infiltrates into books through their characterization. For instance in Jande’s Ambition, Sangao, a boy, is the one who always thinks of ideas while Jande, a girl, waits to implement, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

*Come here,” he said. “Help me make a ball and then let’s go out in the fields and play with it.”*
“How can we do that?” asked Jande. She was always ready to do anything her brother suggested, p8.

♦ “While I am away,” Sangao said, “you make some string with this.”
“Where did you learn to make this sort of thing?” asked Jande. She did admire her brother. He was always thinking up something new, p8.

♦ As soon as Mary and their mother were out of sight, Sangao said, “Jande, I have an idea.”
“What is it? Asked Jande. Her brother’s ideas were always exciting, p13.

The above illustrations just form a negligible fraction of the presentation of Sangao as a faster thinker and preferred leader and Jande, his lackey. We find a similar situation between Mwende and Kilundo in The Poor Child. All through, the portrayal of Mwende is that of self-pity. She is always in trouble with her stepmother, and she is always on the losing side, even where she is innocent. A case in point is where Kilundo steals his mother’s money, p30, but it is Mwende who bears the brunt. Kilundo’s character portrays him as witty, proud and arrogant. He makes mistakes and tactfully implicates Mwende as he himself gets away with it. Mwende on her part, is always tongue-tied, and unable to defend herself.

We realize that Mwende and Kilundo are children of the same age. But, while the latter is able to quickly think out of a problem, the former cannot even offer an explanation on a most simple matter. When for instance Kilundo drops Mwende’s shoes into a pit-latrine, p9, he quickly and tactfully manages to convince his mother that Mwende sold the shoes for money. The latter cannot
just think of how to counter this accusation. She therefore comes out as one who cannot reason equally with her stepbrother.

As mentioned earlier, girls are often associated with flattering attributes such as being kind, sympathetic, generous, humble or gentle. However, the same attributes are often used to give credence to their presumed emotional weakness. Much as these are admirable qualities which an individual should be proud to possess, the patriarchal culture which exalts “masculine strength” and “masculine aggressiveness and toughness,” negate them into undesirables. These qualities are eventually feminized and then expressed in terms like, “crying easily,” or “crying over nothing,” or being easily deceived and giving in easily.” For instance, in Fine Feathers, it is Tecla’s humility and kindness to the well-dressed youth that encourages the youth to take advantage of her, consequently stealing from her. Meanwhile, her sympathy makes her cry when the thief is apprehended and treated roughly. This sequence of events does not paint a positive image of Tecla. Instead, one tends to see her as naïve, careless, unwise and even temperamental.

When we meet her on page 16, Tecla is psychologically tortured, as the following statement suggests: “Tecla flopped to her seat aghast at the rough treatment meted out to a frail man … tears rolled freely down her checks and, much as she valued her kiondo and contents, she would rather have forfeited it than feel responsible for such suffering. Ignoring the other passengers, she closed her eyes and sat numbly praying for the nightmare to end.” This points to Tecla’s emotional weakness.
Tecla’s intelligence is put to task when the police officers involve her in trying to identify the thief of her bag. First of all, she tries to absolve the young man who had been sitting next to her on the train, on grounds that he looked kind and smartly dressed. He had also been friendly. But as things turn out, the young man is the thief after all. Tecla looks so confused that she is unable to identify the thief. Instead, she looks at him and passes on. This particular portrayal of Tecla depicts her as displaying lack of keenness.

Once more, Tecla’s character contrasts sharply with that of Ojango’s in *Settling the Score*. Ojango easily overcomes his fear after his fight with the python, p9, and he has the courage to flee to a safer place. He also chooses to stop struggling, to keep out of trouble with the gangsters. Moreover, he is able to take the correct decision when he hides a notebook belonging to the gangsters. Ojango knows that the notebook could be useful later in tracking down the men, in addition to serving as evidence for the police.

More often than not, the girl character comes out as one deserving pity, susceptible to making wrong decisions, suffering psychological guilt as a result of sidestepping what the general society expects of her and/or displaying emotional weakness and often crying wantonly. For instance, Mwende in *The Poor Child* cries when she gets lost, p40; Jande in *Jande’s Ambition* cries when she fails an examination and she cries when she cannot sew at the Weaving Centre; Kagai in *Kagai and her Brothers*, cries for sweets and she also cries as she flees from a hen while Tecla in *Fine Feathers* cries when she sees violence meted out to somebody, his crime notwithstanding. Similarly when Joseph’s
family is faced with famine in *The Magic Stone*, his wife keeps crying and she cannot be pacified. “Her grinding stomach keeps her mind only on one thing – food,” p45. Female characters seem immersed neck-deep into the culture of crying.

However, despite this general picture of psychological, mental and emotional weakness, some girl characters come out strongly as is the case of Wangui in *Little Wangui*, Obera in *The Wise Little Girl* and Mekatilili in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*. Wangui is a very strong character who combines kindness and sympathy with diligence and strong will. Out of her kindness and sympathy, she decides to assist the old sick woman and through her diligence and determination, she weathers the hardships of the dangerous forest until she secures the medicine the old woman needs for curing her leg. Similarly, Obera becomes a renowned healer at a tender age of two.

### Conclusion

Mekatilili in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, is another strong girl. She comes out as a fighter against the traditions of her society that inhibit girls, while promoting the interests of the boys. Mekatilili’s resolve to go against oppressive societal prescriptions is not dampened by her mother’s constant scolding. She is neither cowed by her brothers’ threats and their exclusionary tendencies, nor is her spirit broken by being detained in a white man’s mission for months. At the end, Mekatilili is the undisputed leader of not only her giri- folk but also becomes the prophesied leader of the Mijikenda people at the time of their greatest need.
As Odaga (1985) says, the writer draws his/her materials from the society. For that matter, strong characters such as Mekatilili, Obera, Wangui and Jande are possible representatives of the girl population in society. One may thus, rightly argue that the purported mental, psychological or emotional weakness of the girl child is just a social construct based not on facts but on opinion. Apparently, the presumed weakness is a mere myth, deliberately perpetrated and necessarily perpetuated, to wage psychological war on girls and women; a war of subjugation aimed at compelling girls and women into subservience. Once girl children are made to believe that a woman is emotionally weak and of necessity constantly needs the protection of men, the patriarchal society has in essence succeeded in training the future women to feel guilty of insubordination if they tried to challenge the menfolk. This way, the myth of male superiority is maintained.

2.3 Conclusion

Our examination of character portrayal in children’s books by Kenyan writers has addressed the subject from two different perspectives; portrayal based on sex and portrayal based on gender. In both types of portrayal, we have drawn an analogy between the patriarchal societal opinion about girl children in particular and women in general, and the portrayal of girl characters in the books. We have also considered the portrayal of girl characters vis-à-vis boy characters as a way of drawing comparisons that are to assist us in determining whether a particular portrayal of girl characters constitutes acceptable or unacceptable portrayal. Such categorization is useful in recommending texts
that offer balanced reading to children readers. Finally, the chapter has attempted to project gender myth as a social construct which is perpetuated to give credence to the patriarchal societal ideologies about girls and women.

3.0 Introduction

This study argues with Taconde and Schelich (2007) on

\textit{Gender Definition of Terms.} We particularly agree with

\textit{Affirmations} have different considerations of what role girls

have in society, the more common wrong ideas of girls that

resulted in either neglect or special treatment is that

they have been used in the schools. Hence, the

Gendernoster. Namely, the effect of social and patriarchal ideas of equality, the lack of discrimination and other gender role

generalizations.

3.1 Narrative

This study is a theoretical that deals with various assumptions about girls and boys in the

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generalizations.
3.0 Introduction

This study agrees with Leech’s and Short’s (1981) view of style as presented under Definition of Terms. We particularly agree with the view that different situations have different considerations of what style really entails. Our use here leaves out the more common aspects of style such as plot, dialogue, humour, viewpoint, irony... Instead, we have considered style in relation to how language has been used in the selected texts to bring about gender differentiation. We have thus, discussed style under the following sub-headings: Naming, Use of nouns and pronouns, Use of generics, Use of vocatives, Use of illustrations and other gendered references, associations and generalizations.

3.1 Naming

Naming is significant in children’s literature. This is because young readers use names to identify their heroes/heroines. A child reader’s hero/heroine in a book could have a name that sounds interesting to the child. Sometimes the name could remind the child reader of a familiar character or a common name in the child’s home place. Similarly the child reader may simply love the role a character plays and wish to identify with the hero/heroine even to the extent of
legendary Mekatilili, leader of the Mijikenda during the early 20th century, associates the book character with leadership and liberation. Indeed, Mekatilili Menyaziwa comes out as a champion against the domesticity for girls that her community prescribes. She instead advocates for girl involvement in extra domestic spheres, as is the case for boys. She wishes that both boys and girls do the cooking or the hunting and looking after animals on rotational basis. This way, the girls would be as exposed as the boys.

The name “Mekatilili” itself serves as a big booster to her self-esteem, because it is always associated with courage and bravery. While alone in the forest, she manages to dispel the fear that was coming over her by reminding herself that, “... I’m Mekatilili. I am an intelligent girl. I am not afraid. I’ve never been afraid. I will succeed...” With this reassurance, Mekatilili feels courageous and is ready to resume her journey, p109. When her courage begins to desert her again she stands once more and says: "I am Menyaziwa ya Menza. I am Mekatilili...I'm like a soldier going to battle. I am brave. I am not afraid...” p112.

In The Wise Little Girl, the name Obera, which in Dholuo means beautiful, tends to predetermine the reader’s view of the heroine as a likable character, and this is later seen through her service to other people. From the very first interaction with Obera, one is struck by her extraordinary abilities that combine with her physical beauty, which is heightened by her sparkling, intelligent eyes.
By the end of the story, the beautiful one is so much liked that everyone is singing her praises.

Similarly, we get a hint of Muthama’s attitude towards her daughter, in *The Poor Child*, from the name he gives her. Mwende among the Akamba means the “beloved.” We perceive Mwende as her father’s most favourite member of the family from the statement: “Why would I be sending money if Mwende weren’t here?” p27. Moreover, Muthama’s frequent quarrels with Mukulu, his wife, pp10 and 26, and their subsequent divorce, p55, are all on account of Mwende. He loves his daughter while Mukulu hates her.

Apart from giving identity to individuals, or describing their status, names often hint on people’s character and may even influence their behaviour as in the case of Mekatilili. Names thus become very significant, no matter what the naming is based on. But despite the significance of names, girls in Sangao’s school are not named. Instead they are referred to in an aggregated manner as, “the girls.” On the contrary, the reader gets to know many of the boys by name, for instance, Joshua, Kitu, Sangao... *Jande’s Ambition*, p31.

It is common that names of girl children are not mentioned. Instead they tend to pass under other peoples identities, preferably their fathers. For instance in *Kagai and her Brothers*, old Zugu-Zugu refers to Nyamusi as “daughter of somebody” instead of calling her by her name. When a girl gets married, she becomes the “wife of somebody.” In *Jande’s Ambition*, Jande’s mother is all
through referred to as the “Chief’s daughter.” In many communities in Kenya, such address is viewed as a sign of respect, as it would be considered impolite for instance, to call one’s mother by name. There are however those who argue that women and girls should always be accorded their own identity instead of being recognized by proxy. The proponents of this view would for instance view it as unfair for Jande’s mother to use her husband’s name throughout the book, as this denies her identity. Odhonji (1994:95) observes that among the Luo, “women are not honoured with any identification.” This is a positing based on the view of the position women occupy among the Luo community. However, even among the Mijikenda, only men are honoured with “vigango,” the memorial sticks while women are not. If a woman is to be honoured, as seen in The Adventures of Mekatilili, “…her memorial stick will be a simple branch from the “Mukone” tree, and it will be plain,” p41. This contradicts the “vigango” for men, which are elaborately decorated or even patterned with marks that identify the honoured. Young Mekatilili regrets that her memorial stick will not be marked with anything, being a woman’s. She sees this as unfair, p41.

Mekatilili’s concern may be viewed as an attempt to address the question: Do those characters that are not named lack anything? “Why should Jande’s mother in Jande’s Ambition, for instance, run through the entire book without a name other than being referred to as the “Chief’s daughter?” Indeed, why should the men’s “vigango” in The Adventures of Mekatilili, be marked with identity while those for women remain plain – unmarked? Can we conclude
that by its reluctance to honour the departed females with identity, society in essence is suggesting that women and girls are of no consequence like Odhonji (1994) notes? Will such a view then be overlooking the role in society of the likes of Obera, the healer in the *The Wise Little Girl*, the kind and brave Wangui in *Little Wangui*, the unwavering ambitious Jande in *Jande’s Ambition*, or the indomitable Mekatili in *The Adventures of Mekatili*? What about the intellect of the likes of Mwende in *The Poor Child*? The point here is that the contribution of girls and women in society is important. So, like their male counterparts, they ought to receive recognition for the roles that they play. They should also enjoy their own identity as individuals.

3.2: Use of Nouns and Pronouns

This section focuses on how nouns and pronouns are used as a means of identifying characters.

Many of the names become gendered through the adoption of the titles “Mr” for men and “Mrs” or “Miss” for women. In the *Priceless Gift* a differentiation between the Mbolotos is made by use of Mr. Mboloto for the man and Mrs. Mboloto for the woman. Similarly, the teacher, Bennett, in *Jande’s Ambition* is addressed as Miss, which differentiates her from Jande’s male teachers.

However this differentiation through gendered titling of names seems to be the case for grown-ups only. Children’s names apparently do not take up the titles Mr, Mrs, or Miss. Instead, children’s names are gendered by taking up the
gendered pronouns: he, she, him, her, his or hers. For instance, the titles *Kagai and her Brothers*, or *Kisalu and his Fruit Garden*, leave the reader in no doubt about Kagai’s and Kisalu’s sex or gender.

Even though “he” is both a gender specific and gender neutral pronoun, as observed by Masinjila (in FEMNET 1994:2), it is often difficult to tell in which respect it is being used. In one story, *Jande’s Ambition*, for instance, “he” is used in the context of a mixed class, thus; “Jande found that there were almost as many girls in the class as there were boys ... A pupil could only go on to the intermediate school if he passed well,” p43. In the next paragraph of the same story, “he” is however used for Jande in particular and in the rest of the story “he” now refers to male characters.

In another story, *The Poor Child*, the writer uses pronouns to cater for both males and females, for instance, “If I catch anyone collecting even a piece of grass from my farm, I will break his or her leg,” p14. While in another story, *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, the writer makes an attempt to avoid altogether the use of gendered nouns and pronouns as seen in Chizi’s answer to Mekatilili’s question:

> If a child disappears, the guards go in search of the child. They look everywhere, but many times a lost child may not be found. If a child has been kidnapped, it is difficult to find that child. But if a child wanders into the forest, the guards can usually find that child,” pp65-66.
Avoiding pronouns, however, appears to bring clumsiness into the text as seen in Chizi's answer. Given the frequency with which the pronoun "he" is used in the gendered form, the users of the title subsequently tend to associate it with male gender roles, so much so that it becomes difficult for a girl to identify with its usage. Even where "he" has been used to refer to both boys and girls as we see in Jande's class, the reference has normally been seen to belong to the boys, thus, denying the girls outright participation.

Quite often, the girl character finds herself suffocating in the depths of a world which is predominantly male. In Jande's Ambition, for instance, all the head teachers in all the schools Jande attends are referred to as "headmaster." Similarly, her teachers with the exception of Miss Bennett are male and all the prefects are boys. In Fine Feathers, Tecla's life is dictated by the male world. The perpetrator of her predicament is a man who cons her of her possessions; her rescuers are the men that sound the alarm and those who assist her recover her stolen property are male police officers. It may not be surprising if girl children in such a situation come to see men as the redeemers of their kind.

It is also observed that the female seems to always play second fiddle in a world where males are seen to have a right to first consideration. Being a reflection of what goes on in society, written books almost always offer a syntactical sequencing of nouns and pronouns. Even activities with a male tag are quite certain to come before those with a female one. As seen in Odaga's Jande's Ambition, Sangao who is a boy always comes before Jande, a girl, for
instance; “Sangao and Jande always played together”, p7; “Sangao and Jande ran breathlessly”, p9; “Sangao and Jande lose the goats,” p10.... Notably, even other nouns and pronouns follow a similar order. Father comes before mother, pp31, 62,..., brothers come before sisters, to create a sequence such as brothers and sisters, pp31, 59...

This syntactical sequencing appears to be the standard practice as seen in a number of books. In Kagai and her Brothers, the order of naming Kagai’s parents is ‘Magomere and Nyamusi’. We also witness a prevalence of patterns such as; “two men and two women,” p36; ‘Jumba and Nadoso and their wives,’ p36, all of which place the woman in second place. Similarly, we note that the men Jumba and Nadoso are identified by their names while the women are aggregated as “wives,” whose mention is occasioned by the only fact that they are the men’s wives.

Further references are, for example, “sons and daughters,” p20, in The Wise Little Girl; ‘men and women,’ p2, in Fine Feathers “Mboloto and Kanini,” p25, in The Priceless Gift; or ‘his/her leg,’ p14, in The Poor Child. The prevalence of instances when men and boys are referred to before turning to women and girls makes this practice appear like the rule rather than the exception. Men and boys speak first. They are the ones who initiate ideas and they are the ones who lead the conversation in a similar way as we see in the following excerpt;

“How right I was to educate my clever daughter,” said Jande’s father on their way home.
“I’m beginning to agree with you,” replied his wife, examining a pink headscarf which Jande had given her when she had said good-bye.

Apart from leading the women into agreeing to what they have to say, the men also take up most of the time and chances in a given discourse. We draw an instance from one of the books, *Kagai and her Brothers*. In one prayer meeting convened to celebrate *italuka* initiation for the boys, Asembe and Asena, the attendance was as follows; two men and two women from Wenyange village, two men and two women from the local church, Jumba and Nadoso and their wives, Magomere and Nyamusi, the parents of the children, Magomere’s three sisters, Pastor Stephen, Zugu-Zugu and the women servers. The meeting therefore comprised of nine men and over ten women excluding the women servers.

However during the time for speeches, Pastor Stephen spoke first, followed by Magomere the father of the initiates. Jumba and Nadoso were also invited to speak after which Pastor Stephen asked one woman, Inisi, to lead in a song. The meeting ended with a prayer from Mzee Elijah.

Such disparity in allocating time and space for women to speak depicts an under representation of women, thus heavily subordinating them to men. This trend could conceivably explain why the book itself concentrates on the activities of Asembe and Asena while Kagai to whom the title of the book is dedicated plays a near negligible role.
Owing to the prevalence in written texts of instances of sequencing male gender items before those of their female counterparts, our projection is that writers may be extending into books what is practised in society, where women are given second place after the men. Otherwise, the argument that male items have always come before female ones as a more or less natural order may not be justified and could be reversed as seen in one or two texts. In *The Wise Little Girl*, Aloo, a girl’s name often comes before Oloo’s, thus creating the sequence “Aloo and Oloo.” Meanwhile in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, Orchardson-Mazrui uses “mother and father”, pp1.2... interchangeably with “father and mother,” p68. Similarly, she uses “sisters and brothers,” p2, as opposed to the usual brothers and sisters. Such usages seem to subvert the otherwise normal order of “male before female,” and further propose the possibility of an inverted order in which women could also come before men.

### 3.3: Use of Generics

As explained under Definition of Terms, generics are designed to be gender neutral. However, their usage has often been gendered. Among the Luhyia, for instance, “Omundu” refers to a person or human being, as Wako (1954:3) explains. Yet a young girl was quoted reporting to her parents: *Omundu yechere ano nende omukhasi, nende abaana babiri* (A person/human being came here with a woman and two children). This reflects a case where a generic has been gendered and given a male character. *Omundu*, human being, here bears the equivalent of a grown-up male and does not apply to females.
Similarly, girls often find themselves left out in the usage of certain terms due to the morphological structure of the words. A girl may, for instance, find it difficult to identify with a word like "fisherman". Even though this word simply refers to a person who catches fish either as a job or a sport, which both men and women do, it has mostly been associated with men. The following statement from *The Wise Little Girl* leaves no doubt about the gender specification of the term fisherman; "Then she (Aloo), left to go and live with Awiti, their aunt, who was married to a fisherman," p7. It may be arguable, but after frequently coming across the common usage of the word "fisherman", one is likely to be uncomfortable with a statement like: "Awiti's husband was a wood carver while she herself was a fisherman." Yet, "Awiti was a fishmonger," would be quite readily acceptable.

Apparently, the unacceptable part of the word fisherman, is "man". "Man", though a gender neutral term, has so often been gendered through slip-ups like "man and his wife", and contradictions such as the following extracted from Brittain and Ripley’s (1963:11) history book for school children:

> Man had become cleverer than the other animals because he was a toolmaker. In the future he was to shape stone for weapons; with these weapons he could kill animals bigger than himself. Today, man is *master* of all other animals.

The inclusion of the word "master" as opposed to "mistress" makes this supposedly gender neutral statement become gender biased. The tool making man consequently becomes a male, with the female divorced from the scene.
Through this kind of gendering, generics like manpower, mankind, and businessman, acquire a partisan character in which only the male becomes the beneficiary.

Some positions automatically exclude girls, for instance, the bus that Mwende in *The Poor Child* boards has a turnboy who is collecting fares. A girl who decides to do a similar job, as they often do, may not know whether to call herself a "turnboy" or a "turngirl". A pertinent question then is; Does the word "turngirl" exist?

Constant associations of men with certain jobs makes children think that these are exclusively male jobs. For instance, all the vehicles that Mwende boards: the bus to Machakos, the bus to Nairobi, the cab to the upcountry taxis, the taxi to Eldoret and the car that transports her from Eldoret to her home, are all driven by males. Similarly, Magomere is the driver in *Kagai and her Brothers* and Mr. Mboloto the driver in *The Priceless Gift*. In *Fine Feathers*, the taxi hired by the robber, the one hired by the police and the police van that arrives later are all driven by men. None of the children's books we examined presents a female driver. This makes it appear as if driving is done by males only. Thus a word without a linguistically in-built gender character gets turned into a male character.

Similarly even though the police force includes policemen and policewomen the more regular references tend to enlist only the men. For instance the man
who assists Mwende in *The Poor Child*, instructs her to look anywhere for a policeman on arrival in Nairobi, p37. “As soon as you have found a policeman, tell him ... that police man should be able to guide you... policemen are good people, don’t fear them.” So when Mwende gets to Nairobi it would hardly occur to her that she could also get help from a policewoman. Meanwhile the people who rescue Ojango in *Settling the Score* are policemen, those who help recover Tecla’s *kiondo* in *Fine Feathers* are policemen and it is policemen who go after Simons kidnappers in *Mistaken Identity*. Due to the tendency to depict the police as comprising only of policemen, a girl may not be able to find an entry point into the police force.

Even etymological terms have been gendered to carry a particular character. The Kiswahili word “*kijana*” (which means a youth) is so commonly associated with boys that girls often find it difficult identifying with its usage. A young girl was quoted telling her friend that, “*ni vijana pekee walioruhusiwa kuingia,*” which translates as: “Only the youth were allowed to enter.” Actually what the young girl meant to tell her friend was that only the boys were allowed to enter.

As observed earlier a good number of etymological terms have been gendered. In *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, the usage of “elders” is in reference to grown up males, although “elder” is a position in society which is supposed to be held by all aged people regardless of their sex. We are told of the elders who beat the Mwandza drums and those who head the homesteads and the *kayas*. There are
other elders who wear *luvoo* bracelets, others who perform important ceremonies and those blessed with the buffalo horn bracelets. According to the custom of Mekatilili’s people, all these functions are preserved for men only. It follows that the reference to elders is directed towards the men, who are the bona fide functionaries in these positions. Similarly, “elders” in *The Magic Stone* refers to the chief and his men. Women therefore are not considered as elders even when they are aged.

The titles given to the elderly people further confirm that only men become elders. Every elderly male in *The Adventures of Mekatilili* takes up the title *Mzee*, the equivalent of elder. For instance, *Mzee Toya*, p24; *Mzee Charo*, p25; *Mzee Ndovu*, p23; *Mzee Pembe*, p65; *Mzee Mwavuno*, p89; *Mzee Nyundo*, p114; while Nyundo’s wife who is as aged as her husband is referred to as *Mama Kasoro*, pp117 and 118; thus excluding her from “*mzee*” or “elder” position.

Since a people’s culture is reflected in their language, which in turn influences the people’s beliefs and attitudes, the young readers who may take their lives’ cues from the books they read end up assimilating the society’s gendered generics and thus the resulting bias against female folk.

3.4. **Use of Vocatives**

A vocative is a form of address which makes a certain use of nouns, pronouns and adjectives, geared towards shaping or influencing opinion about the
addressee by associating one with certain qualities. Vocatives used by men towards women such as "my dear," or "my sweet young lady," are quite common. In many cases, there may be no congruent reason why the speaker tries to draw attention to the lady’s age by use of "young lady." Yet vocatives may be quite effective as they often bestow status, or demean, or patronize, or shed light on inherent attitudes towards the person addressed.

In our reading of the selected titles, we recorded very frequent usage of the adjectives "small" and "little," in reference to girl characters. To start with, Kola’s title is *The Wise Little Girl*. Reading through the book, we come across "little Obera," pp19,31..., while in Kamau’s *Little Wangui*, the main character is from time to time referred to as "little Wangui," pp1,4,30 ... In *Jande’s Ambition*, Jande, though almost as big as her brother, Sangao, is called "little Jande," but the same is not used for her brother. Kagai too in *Kagai and her Brothers* is often referred to as "little Kagai," pp1,27, 30 ..., while Mwende in *The Poor Child* is called, "little witch," p26, "little girl", p32 "little thief," pp33, 34....

Similarly, Mekatilili in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*, is often addressed by several speakers as little girl as revealed in the following statements:

- "Welcome to our mission, little girl," said Mrs. Abraham (to Mekatilili), p91.
- "You are too grown up for a little girl," Rachael said in exasperation, p96.
Other girls in the text also share the same kind of address, as seen about “the little girl with trembling lips,” p37.

It is notable that the use of “small” or “little” is hardly in association with boy characters, not even where the boys are same age or smaller than “the little girls.” For instance, Mwadori is not any bigger than Mekatilili, nor Magic Boy older than “little” Wangui, in *The Adventures of Mekatilili* and *Little Wangui* respectively. A similar comparison can also be drawn from Mwende and the boy, Kilundo, in *The Poor Child*, and Jande and Sangao or her younger brothers, in *Jande’s Ambition*. We realize that as much as the boys in all these references qualify to be referred to as “small” or “little” as well, only the girls carry the tag.

We get tempted to think that the preference to refer to girls as small or little could be an extension of the society’s derogatory tendencies towards girl children. The implication of the girl’s “smallness” or “littleness” also seems to go hand in hand with the society’s view of girls as delicate and helpless, thus requiring the protection of the boys. Girls are not expected to manage on their own. This possibly explains why Rachel advises Mekatilili not to attempt to go from the mission to Kaya Fungo alone: “... I think it is far, especially for a girl...” p92. The implication here is that only a boy could manage the journey from the mission to Kaya Fungo. However, when Mekatilili escapes from the mission, she manages to get to safety on her own.
A good number of other references to girl characters too, appear intended to emphasize their presupposed lower status. In *The Poor Child*, for instance, Mwende is repeatedly referred to as “a poor girl.” Apparently, Mwende’s poverty is not related to material possessions, because she is well provided for by her father, but rather to do with her social status. She has to work long hours to satisfy people at her home, especially her stepbrother, Kilundo. The latter is Mwende’s agemate but he cannot just do anything for himself. Mwende does everything for him. Being a girl, Mwende has to work, for as her stepmother says, a girl should not compare herself with a boy. The boy Kilundo, may refuse to carry out duties he is assigned but not Mwende. This means that boys may work by choice, yet girls have no option but to work. However, despite Mwende’s working hard, her stepmother still calls her names such as “the pampered one,” “worthless little thing,” “worthless creature,” “a dreadful delinquent creature,” “a bloody beetle,” “hedgehog,” “bloody little beetle,”... These abuses would have been expected, especially coming from a step-mother to a step-child. Mwende in this case however, seems to suffer the abuses because she is a girl. Her stepmother has always made it clear that Mwende, being a girl, does not need to be excused, unlike Kilundo, who is a boy.

We further observe that the kind of qualities attributed to girl children as praise or appreciation, often turn out to be of disadvantage to them. In *Jande’s Ambition*, for instance, Jande is identified as being pretty. However, her being pretty could become the cause of her dropping out of school, for as her uncle,
Nyaku says, Jande is pretty enough. So what she needs is a husband but not school. By calling Jande pretty, people do not mean to praise her. They are instead looking for a reason to marry her off. It is thus conceivable that society has created and associated certain vocatives with girls for the express purpose of subjugating them into diminutive positions. Notably, the vocatives are effected through patronizing the girls or tending to treat them as tender babies. Further still, the men want to depict girls as flowers that would make excellent prizes for men, for instance, because the young man in *The Villager's Son* has been to school, the villagers suggest that he is given the prettiest girl in the village as an appreciation of his hard work.

3.5: Illustrations

Illustrations in a book refer to explanatory examples. In children's books, illustrations may include pictures and diagrams, often with accompanying explanatory lines of text. Illustrations form an important component in enhancing the understanding of a text, as they tend to repeat the text through pictures. Since they are controlled by the plot of the story and the thematic concerns of the writers, illustrations come very close to telling a story on their own. Indeed in picture books, readers follow the story through illustrations.

As noted earlier, illustrations in a text play a major role. Cass (1967:6) points out that learners' opinions and attitudes may be shaped by illustrations even before reading or being introduced to a text. Cass' observation underscores the
influence illustrations could have on a young reader, thus throwing into the limelight the question of appropriateness of illustrations in children’s books.

A notable pattern emerging from illustrations, as observed in the texts analysed, tend to give males more consideration than females. There are instances when only men’s pictures are used even where the world depicted is neutral. In one history book for children (Brittain and Ripley, 1963:12&16), for instance, “A man of the Stone Age,” and “Stone Age man making fire,” are both represented by pictures of men as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Both situations however are meant to elicit a neutral representation, since Stone Age man comprised of both male and female.

Figure 1 A man of the Stone Age
In the same children's history book (Brittain and Ripley, 1963:34, 81, 91, 93, 94, 96, 102 & 201) pictures of men are continuously used to represent both male and female figures. Illustrations showing; a Swahili, Omani Arabs, a Tanganyika Bantu, a Mgalla, a Luo, a Mtusi, a Kikuyu elder and a Mganda are all presentations of males as seen in Figures 3 to 10 respectively. Indeed women are completely left out. This could easily give children the impression that only men made history.
Figure 3  A Swahili
Figure 4  Oman Arabs
Figure 5  A Tanganyika Bantu
Figure 6  A Galla
While in Farrant (1971:17) Figure 11, a council of elders is represented by a group of elderly men only, as if to suggest that only men can be elders and elderly women do not exist.
Such unbalanced representation of men and women in illustrations is obviously bound to confuse young readers, who may end up associating most, if not all generics with males, because that is the impression they will have got. Subsequently, the world they come to envisage could either exclude women and girls, or their existence may not be considered as of any consequence.

However, in illustrations where both men and women appear, the latter appear to be in the shadows of the former. Alternatively, women are placed to appear at the back, or simply dotted here and there among a multitude of men. In Figure 12 for instance, Kagai is seen timidly clutching behind her brother, apparently for the “protection that a girl must get from a boy”. Being at the back, she is nearly masked by the bigger and more clearly outlined pictures of her brothers. Ironically this is the cover picture of the very book titled *Kagai and her Brothers*. While in Figure 13, Tecla is seen seated primly at the back,
apparently removed from what the men who miserably outnumber women, are
doing. It would seem as if her presence does not matter at all.

Figure 12 The Book cover for Imbuga’s *Kagai and her Brothers*.

Figure 13 Tecla among men characters

Apart from the impression of timidity that the two pictures of Kagai and Tecla
display, they give another dimension of females looking on as the males
perform. Indeed, Tecla seems completely ignored in the ensuing drama in Figure 13. And in Figure 12, Kagai’s brothers are jumping with excitement at watching the fighting rams, while Kagai is wretchedly dying with fright at the back unable to take any part at all.

Quite often, illustrations depict girls as ill suited or unadaptable to their environment, while the boys are quite at home or enjoying themselves all the time. A comparison between Figures 14 and 15 (both book covers) reveals the girl (Mwende) in a depressed disposition while the boy (Ojango) is having fun, playing away at his ball. The same could be said of Figures 12 and 13 where Kagai cannot find fun when her brothers are enjoying themselves or where Tecla cannot take part in the events taking place around her. The general picture is most often that of girls in a state of poverty, struggling through their nervous, inhibited dispositions, or simply suffering under conditions over which they have no control as seen in Figure 14. Meanwhile, their boy counterparts are able to master every situation to suit their needs. They come out as a jolly lot, freely exercising their physical and mental prowess, as is the case in Figure 15.

Figure 14  Mwende on the book cover of *The Poor Child*
A good number of illustrations too, portray girls as being always on the receiving end. A girl for instance will be seen suffering intimidation from a boy younger than herself, as is the case in Figure 16, which presents a withdrawn Mwende versus the bully Kilundo.

Most often, the helpless poor girl will appear posing the common picture of a victim of impending danger, as seen in Figures 17 and 18. In Figure 17, Aloo is
trying to escape Oloo’s beating while Mwende in Figure 18, is presented fleeing Mukulu’s wrath. However, the girl child’s constant flight is not necessarily always caused by visible danger. Apparently, because of her presumed inherent fear, a girl child could flee from anything, as is the case in Figure 19, where we see Kagai fleeing from a fowl. All through the texts we examined, no boy character has been portrayed in the same manner.

Figures 17, 18 and 19 The character in constant flight

Notably, it also seems as if girls always fall victims of men’s deceit and greed. In Figure 20, the man who wins Tecla’s trust with his sweet words and gentle
manner, later robs her of her belongings when she falls asleep in Figure 21. Similarly, Mekatilili is kidnapped by two men in Figure 22.

Figure 20 Tecla and the well dressed young man

Figure 21 Tecla the victim

Figure 22 Mekatilili the victim
The illustrations depict girls as easy targets for unscrupulous men who take advantage of their unsuspecting trust. It would not be surprising if this was one of the ways of trying to prove man’s supposedly superior wit over the woman’s. However, when girls are consistently portrayed as regular victims of men, such portrayal depicts them as stupid people who are always allowing themselves to be duped.

As observed earlier, illustrations are capable of shaping the reader’s opinion and attitudes. Care therefore needs to be taken about what kind of illustrations appear in children’s books as these can have far-reaching effects on the children who get exposed to them.

3.6 Other Gendered References, Associations and Generalizations

In this section we attempt to address those references that contain either covert or overt derogatory connotations towards the girls and women in the use of language. The one question that interests us is:

♦ What images of women in general and girls in particular, are created by use of language?

It is noteworthy to point out that the picture painted of female characters is different from that of males. While males have been associated with attributes such as leadership, power to protect and ability to act judiciously as seen earlier, females have generally been viewed as irrational and dependent. Such a
view of females could possibly explain some of these commonly used stereotypical phrases we recorded from day to day interactions:

- Frail like a woman – one is weak
- Walk like a woman – one is slow
- Eat like a woman – one eats shyly or takes time eating
- Bath like a woman – one takes much time bathing
- Talk like a woman – one is soft
- Should have been born a woman – meaning one is not strong enough to face the challenges of life

The same views are expressed in Kiswahili but from the perspective of the man:

- Jikaze kiume – put in effort like a man
- Vumilia kama mwanamume – persevere like a man
- Chapu chapu kama mwanamume – alert like a man
- Yeye ni mwanamume – one is strong or enduring

Such negative views about females can be observed in many books, including those written for children. For instance, as a way of inspiring Kamwaki in *The Priceless Gift* to pick courage, Tom tells him: “A man shouldn’t be scared of such small things. You behave like a girl...” p21. Tom’s remarks make it appear as if it is something deplorable to be a girl.
Further still, the view of the boy as a shepherd of the girls and the pertinent myth that girls cannot manage on their own is brought to life in *The Adventures of Mekatili*. When Mekatili meets her cousins Chizi, Mbodza and Masezi, rivalry between them leads them into frequent quarrels amongst each other, with the boy Mwadori frequently arbitrating between them. This situation also tends to perpetuate the myth of girls' jealousy and inherent malice against one another, thus fitting in with the stereotype that women are always quarrelling when left alone. Viewed against that background, it is not surprising when Kemunto, Kwamboka and Kembo in *The Magic Stone*, keep subverting Moraa's efforts to get decorated. The three girls are depicted as jealous and irresponsible. They cannot give Moraa the support she expects and they cannot even give her the right direction to the decorator's hut. Later, the girls cry when Moraa's decorations appear more beautiful than theirs. The depiction of the three girls as extremely jealous could be a result of the societal stereotype that women are always jealous of one another.

Similarly, Jande's mother's insistence that Jande leaves school to stay at home and get a husband, could easily be used to qualify another assertion that the woman is her own enemy. In effect, Jande's mother here is seen as a woman against the emancipation of her own kind. Ironically it is Jande's father who bitterly opposes the arrangement of getting the girl out of school.

Put to cost, the female costs less. While female slaves in *The Adventures of Mekatili*, cost six *fundos*, one pays eight or ten *fundos* for a male one.
Similarly, Muthikwa in *Kisalu and his Fruit Garden*, is considered as some commodity as she is counted among the items that go to pay Kisalu for his destroyed crops. The payment is three goats, one cow and Muthikwa.

Another observation to note is that, success for boys and men is largely attributed to their being male, as is the case of Pongo in *The Adventures of Pongo and Uncle Talema*. In this particular book, the protagonist’s success is seen as a result of his wit and masculine strength, a quality that all men are assumed to possess. However, for a female, success is normally attributed to individual rare qualities in a particular female character. So when Jande’s mother in *Jande’s Ambition* manages as a successful mother, wife and advisor, credit goes to her specifically because, “she was an intelligent woman and full of useful ideas, although she had never had a formal education,” p7. Moreover, she was the daughter of a chief. This therefore is not expected to be an attribute of all females. But as we explained earlier, negative attributes such as foolishness and other derogatory references are often aimed at describing the state of women in total.

The motif of women as belonging to the kitchen or only suited for domestic chores is well exemplified through Jande in *Jande’s Ambition*, Mwende in *The Poor Child, Aloo* in *The Wise Little Girl* and Mekatilili in *The Adventures of Mekatilili*. Jande is expected to leave school so that she could help her mother at home. Mwende is expected to do all the housework without assistance from Kilundo because the latter is a boy. Meanwhile Mekatilili has problems
because she does not like domestic chores but prefers to go hunting "like the boys." The focus, it seems, is for the girls to learn to be good wives and responsible mothers so as to get husbands. Since marriage is projected as the highest achievement for girls, they have to prepare well so as to succeed in their marriages, thus the need to specialize in domesticity.

3.7: Conclusion

Our analysis reveals that through the use of images, metaphors and symbols, society tries to confine the girl child in all aspects while allowing the boy child room for self-emancipation. Language in a patriarchal society has thus, been used as a tool of encouraging, training, coaxing and even coercing girls into a culture of subordination and subservience to boys and men in general. Books on the other hand, being a product of society, often serve as a convenient medium for articulating the society’s stereotypes about girls and women.
CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

4.0 Summary

We set out to look at how girl characters are portrayed in selected children’s books by Kenyan writers. In doing this, our study drew impetus from a number of factors. Firstly, we acknowledged the fact that a community’s culture is reflected in its language. Our second positing was that Kenya being a majorly patriarchal society, the interests of girls are considered second to those of boys, or at times excluded altogether. Thirdly, our study operated on the premise that the proximity of the literary writers to their society influences them to echo in their writings the values that the society upholds.

In view of the above facts, we had anticipated the prevalence of societal stereotypes about women and girls in children’s books owing to the possible influence on the writers by the society. We also envisaged rampant use of gender imbalanced language, as well as the existence of illustrations that depict the girl as subordinate to or/and dependent on the boy.

Our response to the demands of the study took two significant pertinent dimensions. We first of all considered girl character portrayal in the selected books and other related texts. We then looked at the style employed by the writers to paint a particular image of their girl characters. However, in
examining characters and style, we frequently referred to the portrayal of boy characters. Our reference to boy characters served as a point of comparison that assisted us in justifying any particular portrayal of girl characters.

All through the study, we also attempted to answer a pertinent question, whether the writers of children’s books perpetuated in their books the age-old patriarchal societal stereotypes on women and girls, or whether they were endeavouring to change. In case they were changing, to what extent were they deviating from what the society upholds about women and girls?

Under characterization, we discussed portrayal based on the parameters of sex and gender. We considered the sex of a character to entail his/her physique and physical strength, while his/her gender enlists psychical and attitudinal values. We observed that while sex is a biological attribute causing a differentiation between maleness and femaleness of characters, one’s gender is an ideological construct applied by society to distinguish between the qualities it considers appropriate for a man or for a woman. This means that sex of characters is universal while their gender is a variable which depends on individual communities, societies, or cultures. However, it is apparent that in most communities, gender roles are delineated on the basis of one’s sex. Duties are then demarcated, specifying them as “male duties” or “female duties.”

We then looked at style in relation to how language is used to bring about gender differentiation between characters. Under this premise, we discussed
how naming, nouns and pronouns, generics, vocatives and illustrations are used as a way of isolating girls from boys, women from men, or what society considers as feminine from what it categorizes as masculine. After critical analysis of style and character portrayal in our prescribed scope of reference, we were able to draw a conclusion that could serve as a generic representation of girl character portrayal in children’s books in Kenya.

4.1: Research Findings

Our study on the portrayal of girl characters in children’s storybooks in Kenya has helped us gain some insight into the position of girl children in the Kenyan society. As pointed out earlier, literature is correctly considered as a mirror of what goes on in society. We are therefore able to closely relate our findings in the books examined with the real situation on the ground. Indeed, basing on how the selected texts related to the lead questions in Appendix 1, a number of observations have come to the fore.

To start with, during our sampling of titles for study, we discovered a dire scarcity of books featuring girl characters. On the contrary, books on boy characters were readily available. Moreover, some of the few books that include girl characters such as *Kagai and her Brothers*, often give girl characters insignificant roles. Quite often, the girl characters in such books hardly influence the plot of the stories.
A good number of writers who have written extensively for children, for instance, Kimenye, author of the “Moses Series,” often depict a world without female characters. However, when female characters happen to appear, they are some kind of zombies who, by sheer chance, got imported in. Similarly, Alembi, another prolific writer for children, has only one book out of eight written between 1994 and 1996, which features a girl character. Other writers such as Wa Thiong’o have come up with sequels like Njamba, Nene, but the focus is the boy character.

A feature distinguishing the boy characters in most of these books is that they are the protagonists, who are also clever and adventurous. For instance, Pongo in *Adventures of Pongo and Uncle Talema*, Ojango in *Settling the Score* and Kamwaki in *The Priceless Gift*, are all very strong characters. Moreover, the boys are innovative and full of experiments like Philip in *High Adventure* who tries to make an aeroplane. The boys are also brave and like Kamwaki, capable of changing for the better. Generally most of the books celebrate male patriarchal values such as control over women, masculine power, the macho image, coercion and the right to make decisions. It is not an accident therefore that Kilundo in *The Poor Child*, though very stupid in school still has so much control over Mwende back at home.

In contrast to the “great boy” image bestowed upon boy characters, the picture painted of girl characters is a bleak one. The latter operate within established role and character stereotypes as weak, foolish, unfaithful, unreliable, lazy,
helpers, or naïve. Similarly, they are always expected to be simple, obedient and self sacrificing for the males. Apparently, the accepted picture is that of boys commanding over the girls; Sangao thinking for Jande (Jande’s Ambition); Oloo commanding Aloo (The Wise Little Girl); Kilundo bullying Mwende (The Poor Child); Mwadori patronizing over Mekatilili (The Adventures of Mekatilili); the smartly dressed young man taking advantage of Tecla (Fine Feathers) or Kamwaki maiming Simi (The Priceless Gift). A boy, regardless of his age, is in control of females including grown up women. This is in compliance with the patriarchal “women subordinate to men” tradition.

Society may disapprove of, or even punish a girl like Mekatilili who wants to take part in an adventure such as going out to hunt with the boys. This is because traditionally, a girl’s roles are confined to domestic chores. The girl will cook, fetch water, collect firewood, collect vegetables, wash clothes, clean the house, look after the baby, wash utensils or milk the cows. This possibly explains why adventure stories for girls are so few as compared to those for boys. That writers scarcely write adventure stories for girls, seems to imply that girls are not capable of adventure. Indeed where they venture into some adventure like Tecla in Fine Feathers, they end up hurting themselves due to their presupposed naivety and inability to be responsible, even for themselves. Tecla’s experiences confirm the scepticism of the patriarchs about the ability of girls to manage on their own, a fact that is used to legitimize patronage of boys over girls. Furthermore, the necessity of the boys to be around, to protect girls increases with the presupposed inherent frailty of the latter.
Girls are lauded and praised for their patience and hard work. Ironically, the very group that is despised as being frail is the same group that is looked to, when it comes to doing most of the work in the family. Like Mwende in *The Poor Child*, girls are expected to be naturally hardworking. They have to work without getting tired. Girls will thus be left with all the work to do as their brothers walk off, ball in hand and catapult strung on the shoulder, headed for their usual place – the playing fields.

In the meantime, society is keen to note and acknowledge the beauty of those very hardworking girls. The girls' beauty assures them of husbands in marriage which is projected as the highest achievement for a girl child. Jande's beauty for instance, is poised to win her a husband when she is barely ten. Seemingly, this is expected to do her parents proud, especially if Jande does not insist on choosing her own husband. That is why her uncle takes up the responsibility of finding her a proper husband on her behalf. Jande, being a girl, has no choice when and whom to marry.

Our analysis of style reveals that even language places males at the fore and females in the rear or in second place. For instance, the use of the pronoun "he" always comes before "she". Similarly males are named first, assuming the order such as: "men and women," "brothers and sisters," "father and mother," "sons and daughters..." In joint meetings, men speak before women and girls
speak after being prompted by boys. Boys also speak more than the girls, and they take more turns than the latter.

It is again notable that language has also converted most of the gender neutral references into gender biased ones in favour of males. A gender-neutral pronoun such as “he,” for instance, has been so constantly used to refer to males that females can hardly identify with it. Moreover, where the reference is not specific there is a tendency to use he/she, thus leaving no doubt that the “he” is a gendered male reference. The same occurs with other gender-neutral terms such as manpower, businessmen or man-made. In fact, the word “businessmen” is so much used in association with male traders that the usage no more seems to incorporate females. In order to counter this usage, terms such as businesswomen, chairwoman or chairperson, have been coined to fill the gap. In a few of the texts, etymological terms such as “elders” or the Kiswahili mzee refer to male characters as noted in The Adventures of Mekatilili; while terms such as “farmer” and “teacher” which have no linguistically in-built gendered character are consistently used with male pronouns as seen in Jande’s Ambition, until they more or less assume male character.

The use of names presents another dimension of gender bias. While male characters are almost always named, this is not the case with female characters. The latter are often aggregated simply as “girls” or “women” as seen in Jande’s Ambition and Kagai and her Brothers. Alternatively, they may be
passed under figures like Miss... or Mrs...., which all describe the female characters in terms of having or not having a husband. If not such figures, descriptions such as daughter of... wife of... are popular instead of calling a female character by her own name.

Illustrations have also been used to subordinate women to men. Male characters, for instance, have often been the only ones shown in an illustration meant to depict a neutral world. In many instances, the female characters are at the back, usually appearing smaller than the males. Common as well, are illustrations in which the female characters are presented looking timid, looking down or looking on while the males perform. Further still, in a good number of illustrations, female characters appear in the domestic household sphere or are involved in other stereotypical roles like child nursing. Moreover, the female characters quite often tend to appear in illustrations that depict poverty, self-pity, desolation or despondency. The male characters on the other hand appear, having fun or creating, as seen in Figures 15 and 22, as contrasted with Figures 13 and 14.

However, alongside these overwhelmingly demeaning tendencies against girl characters, we noted that there is an effort, albeit little, to emancipate some. For instance, Jande’s insistence on and consistence in her schooling sees her successfully fight against all attempts to marry her off at a tender age. We later see her competing quite well against fellow girls and the boys, an effort that sees her achieve her ambition of becoming a teacher.
Similarly, Mekatilili’s efforts to fight against the injustices that are imposed on girls, preventing them to emancipate themselves, deserves mention. Mekatilili, a prophesied leader of the Mijikenda people, comes out as a strong character ready to turn things round. She does not, for instance, understand why boys should be treated differently from girls. She does not see why domesticity should be a prescription for girls alone, when the boys are involved in extra-domestic endeavours which serve to expose them, thereby giving them advantage over the girls. Mekatilili’s stand may just be what girl children want in order to earn some positive consideration by the society.

In *Little Wangui*, the girl Wangui exhibits what a girl is capable of, when she undertakes a very dangerous mission of fetching a pot of medicine from the midst of man-eating giants. She manages to kill them and to retrieve the medicine that becomes very useful to mankind.

Little Obera in *The Wise Little Girl* however, exaggerates her abilities, thus divorcing herself from reality. At two, Obera is bigger than her age and she is able to speak fluently. She soon becomes a healer who quickly gains fame. Her fame gets to its peak when she treats the king of his ailments after other healers have failed. This propels her into wealth at such a tender age of two.

From the findings of this study, we have established that the majority of Kenyan writers of children’s books have continued to perpetuate the old
societal stereotypes about girl children. In view of this, girl characters have been portrayed as being subordinate to or dependent on boy characters. For this reason, girls have almost always appeared second after boys. As noted earlier, the view of girls as inferior to boys, is a patriarchal societal view. This seems to be the view that has influenced the writers in their portrayal of girl characters, in their writings. Indeed, as Odaga (1985) points out, writers draw their material and characters from the society.

However, we have recorded an attempt by a few writers to deviate from the society's norms, by painting a more positive picture of girl characters, thus giving credence to Rosenblatt's (1968:83) conviction that literature can be redefined or reformed to serve new purposes. Some characters like Jande, Wangui and Mekatilili have often been depicted as achievers and quite capable of growth. They have initiative and self-motivation, and only need a conducive atmosphere under which to work towards success. They may need occasional support such as that given to Wangui by Magic Boy to assist her on her journey through the forest. Even so, everybody else needs support from fellow human beings. Moreover, girls are equally ready and able to assist others, for instance, little Obera is able to assist in saving the king's life, while the medicine that Wangui manages to retrieve from the White Hill becomes helpful to Magic Boy's family. Dependency is thus reciprocal. It is not accurate therefore, to portray girl characters as one-sided dependants. Human beings depend on one another, their sex notwithstanding.
Otherwise from our examination of children’s books by Kenyan writers, three distinct girl character portrayals have emerged, each in varying proportions. Diminutive portrayal is most prevalent. However a few writers have attempted to deviate by trying to emancipate their girl characters while cases of over glorifying them are almost negligible. Our conclusion then is that the majority of writers for children in Kenya, perpetuate the society’s diminutive view of girl children.

A pertinent question that comes to mind is: Is this portrayal of girl characters by writers a deliberate attempt to create a particular image of girl children? In our interview with Orchardson-Mazrui, she hinted to us that her portrayal of Mekatilili was a deliberate effort to create a strong girl character: “… in the case of Mekatilili, I particularly wanted a girl-child to address today’s issues of gender, leadership, and other issues of the girl child; a strong girl child with self confidence”. The other writers we interviewed confirmed that they did not intend to paint a particular image of the girl character in their books. Imbuga however, argues that: “characters should not be contrived to cause convenience... I prefer that the girl character remains true to prevailing reality”. The implication of Imbuga’s stand is that he wants his girl character to be a reflection of the girl child in real life. But Alembi says: “ I write to communicate to the child. What the girl character becomes during my writing is an unconscious process.
Based on the arguments of the writers we interviewed, it is apparent that diminutive portrayal of girl characters is often done unwittingly. The most probable reasons being, either the writers are presenting the girl character the way society views the girl child, or they are presenting a diminutive picture of the girl character without knowing, or without intending to. Either way, the writers' position, in our view, represents an internalized opinion about girl children that the writers hold as a result of influence by the society. Even in cases where the writers want to emancipate their girl characters, as Orchardson-Mazrui attempts to do, instances of a girl as a weaker character keep sneaking in. Mwadori, for example, often exhibits a stronger character than Mekatilili. He can walk for a longer time, he knows more about his people's customs and he is brave enough to attack a snake that had otherwise got Mekatilili shivering with fright.

4.2 Suggestions

We realize that literature plays a significant role in the socialization process of children. But as Njoroge (1978) points out, literature can be manipulated to either boost or destroy the image and dignity of a people. Writers of children's books therefore, possess a tool that they can use to inculcate positive or negative societal values. However, Achebe (1974) says that the role of the writer is to educate his people. This means that writers have the duty of showing direction to the society. This realization raises a pertinent question: What kind of society do the writers intend to nurture through their writings? Is it the kind of society that will continue to bolster male chauvinism in boys
while instilling a sense of inferiority in girls, or is it the kind that will strive towards mutual respect between boy and girl children?

As Rosenblatt (1968) observes, literature can be redefined or reformed to serve new purposes. This means that literature is not static. Writers may therefore not be justified in perpetuating negative societal values under the excuse that they are being faithful to what society upholds. Instead, as Wamahiu (1993:6) suggests:

Culture defined roles and relationships should best be seen as a human contract. In other words, these roles and relationships are not immutable and unchangeable. Where there is a felt and justified need, then there is no reason why these roles and relationships can not be revised. One does not have to continue oppressive practices if they have outlived their use.

Writers should, in this case take up the challenge of coming up with books that will encourage an equitable world for both boys and girls. Such books will attempt to recognize the girl child’s potential and encourage her to develop to maturity – books that will talk about the girl character more and in a more positive manner.

On their part, publishers and patrons of children’s books are urged to try and consider the gender responsiveness of children’s books before publishing them, or availing them to children respectively. The type of books that should get to the readership of children should be such books as those recommended by Kenya Oral Literature Association (Kola), in Masinjila, M Comp. (1992). Such
books include, for instance, *Junior Pilot* by Mpesha, *Tit for Tat* by Njoroge, *The Talking Devil* by Omolo and *The Powerful Magician* by Irungu. Kenyan writers of books for children could also take an example from books such as *Growing up at Lina School* by Maqgoye, Hunter’s stories in *The Vanishing Potatoes* and *Days of Silence* by Umelo, as these are books that try to emancipate both boy and girl characters.

The scope of our study was to find out the presence and extent of societal stereotypes on girl children, in children’s storybooks. We recommend similar studies in drama and poetry, since the two genres are also popular with children. We also urge a study that will seek to establish the effect of societal stereotypes on the girl children concerned. We further believe that stereotyping of girls may not only impede their social, mental and emotional growth, but could also prejudice the way boys view girls, thus influence their future interaction. Another study therefore needs to be carried out to examine the possible effect that stereotyping of girls could have on boys.
PRIMARY TEXTS


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Appendix 1

LEAD QUESTIONS TO THE STUDY

These Lead questions were constructed according to Kabira and Masinjila’s (1997) ABC of Gender Analysis Guide.

We try to gauge the gender responsiveness of the selected text basing on how much each of the text attempts to answer the questions (see methodology).

Questions on Narration of the Story.

1. Who tells the story? About whom?
2. From whose view is the story told?
3. What are the actions in the story?
4. Who initiates what sort of story?
5. How are the actions (labour) distributed?
6. Is there a hierarchy of activities and persons?
7. (a) Which activity is at the top? Why? (b) Which activity is at the bottom? Why?
8. (a) Who is at the top? Why? (b) Who is at the bottom? Why?
9. Is there specification of who does what?
10. What is the focus of activities?
11. (a) Which places signify importance? Why? (b) Which places are unimportant?
12. (b) Who operates in the important places? (b) Who operates in the unimportant places?
13. How much privilege do the favoured enjoy?
14. How is power distributed?
15. How is the power maintained and perpetuated?
16. How is language used to refer to characters?
17. What images of boys and girls are created by the use of language?
Questions on Illustration in the Story

1. What are the activities presented by the illustrators?
2. How do the illustrations present the characters?
3. Is there any gender stereotyping?
4. (a) Which activities demean the performer?
   (b) Which activities enhance prominence or status?
5. How do the sizes of the pictures compare by gender?
6. Is there a pattern in the sizes?
7. What kind of dress do the characters wear?
8. What other features seem to have been made prominent by the illustrator? Why?
9. Who is most visible and why?
Appendix 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH THE WRITERS

(a) Childhood and Family

1. In which part of Kenya did you grow up? ......................................................

2. Did you grow up with the rest of the family? .................................................

3. How was the composition of the family in terms of siblings? ..........................................................

4. How many girl siblings were ahead of you in age? ........................................

5. What did your parents do for a living? ............................................................

6. How did you share duties in the family? .........................................................

7. Which type of storybooks did you like reading most? ........................................

8. Which character in terms of sex, did you prefer as the lead character in the books you read? Why? ..........................................................

(b) Education and Writing

1. Could you briefly talk about your schooling? ..................................................

2. What inspired you to begin writing for children? ............................................

3. Which writer of children’s books has served as your inspiration? How? ...........

4. Which character in terms of sex do you prefer to use as the protagonist for your stories for children? Why? ..................................................

5. Which character of your own creation has been most memorable to you? Why? ........................................................................
6. What in your view is the best portrayal of the boy/girl character?

7. How much do you agree with the opinion that literature can be modified or redefined and must not necessarily be a mirror image of the society’s standard norms?

8. How much should literature be allowed to deviate from what is generally accepted as the society’s standard norms?

9. (a) What inspired you to write the following book(s)?

   (b) Why did you choose this particular character for your book?

10. Do you consciously write to appeal to boys or girls? Please explain.

11. What is your view on books written specifically for girls or boys?